

# Early Transitions to ECE Aotearoa, New Zealand

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Final report to Cognition Trust November 2021

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# Overview of the Project

The primary objective of this project was to support educational research that determines the nature and impacts of different kinds of transitional experiences, (and associated practices and policies), on infant, toddler and young children as they move into and through their ECE programmes, and on to school. More specifically the objective was to appreciate the impacts of differing transition experiences *over time* for young children's *emotional and social wellbeing*.

We interpret transitions as events of change into, between and out of ECE context, discernible through a series of dialogues, interactions, and secondary sources. A particular emphasis is granted to infant transitions since there is very little known about the social and emotional impacts or practices of these early experiences in early childhood education (ECE). Meanwhile the inclusion of infants into ECE is the 'new normality' in Aotearoa New Zealand, and elsewhere. While transitions to school are widely acknowledged as having an impact on children's learning, much less is known about younger learners entering ECE spaces. This is important because recent enrolment figures (Education Counts, 2020) tell us that 61% of under-two-year-olds (43% of one-year-olds) now attend ECE. Despite these increasing numbers, there are very few pedagogical guidelines available to ECE teachers (hereafter called 'kaiako' in keeping with the Aotearoa New Zealand ECE curriculum framework: *Te Whāriki*) concerning this younger age group<sup>1</sup> and very little is known about the nature of transition experiences in contrast to older age groups transitioning to primary school or beyond.

Following a six-month pilot<sup>2</sup> (2016) four infants across diverse Aotearoa New Zealand ECE settings over 5-years were followed through each of their transitions into, between and out of ECE. Observational, video, and interview data were generated at each transition point as we recorded infant experiences and interviewed parents and kaiako – before and after each transition. Teacher-researchers from each ECE service were trained to observe and record, while external researchers conducted interviews. As part of a wider *International Infant Study of the Social and Emotional Experience of Transition* (hereafter known as ISSEET) with university partners in six other countries (Strathclyde University, Scotland; Jyväskylä University, Finland; RMIT, Australia; University of Sao Paulo, Brazil; Arkansas University USA) insights were shared across geographically, ideologically, and pedagogically diverse spaces. This work is ongoing since the other countries started data generation at different times over these years, and took slightly different approaches according to funds at their disposal<sup>3</sup>.

Our findings at the time of writing this report show that by the time these Aotearoa New Zealand infants arrived at school, they had experienced in excess of three transitions already – from home to the infant centre, infant centre to 2-3-year-old centre and, often, to kindergarten or preschool at ages 3-4. Irrespective of context or its continuity, positive early transitions to ECE were impacted greatly by the policies and practices of each ECE service, ranging from the establishment of a primary teacher model to flexible routines. Overall, policies and practices that were negotiated rather than imposed were more likely to work well for everyone, although they did take more time during the earliest days of transition. The first transition to ECE brought additional challenges for parents and kaiako who needed to

take unhurried, and sometimes exclusive, time to build trusting and supportive relationships in the mutual best interests of the infants.

The insights generated out of this investigation highlight the importance of ensuring that infants, toddlers and young children have ample opportunities to lead the transition process – having their preferences upheld through attuned dialogues with people, places, and things. Furthermore, significance is placed on seizing opportunities for infants (and their whānau) to contribute to the ECE context in their own, unique ways, at their own pace. The results of this project have direct implications for kaiako working with infants, toddlers, and young children as they make their journey through the educational system of ECE and onto school. By providing pedagogical insights concerning, i) what works, ii) what does not work, and iii) the corresponding impact of kaiako practices on the social and emotional wellbeing of learners, the project offers ECE kaiako a range of approaches to transitions that will ultimately advance better learning outcomes for children.

This report should be read in tandem with the accompanying website (<https://www.earlytransitions.com/>) – with the intended audience of the website being Aotearoa New Zealand kaiako, who work within bicultural ECE contexts.

## 1. Intended Outcomes of the Project

- ✓ To move ECE kaiako toward generating data and answering questions about the effectiveness of existing transition processes in terms of how children are better off emotionally and socially as a result of their work.
- ✓ For teacher-researchers to apply insights to their own practice and kaiako, and share these with the wider ECE community.
- ✓ For teacher-researchers to gain research skills in inquiry, data generation using qualitative and quantitative methods, analysis, and dissemination of results.
- ✓ To establish a website resource for Aotearoa New Zealand kaiako to highlight a series of 'best practices' that may be applied to ECE contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand, and which include practical video data/vignettes, images and examples.
- ✓ To produce a series of national and international publications that will contribute to the knowledge base concerning early transitions into, between and out of ECE.

Ultimately it was anticipated that the project would generate and then illuminate practices that work for positive early transitions, and in doing so, benefit the increasing numbers of young children (infants and toddlers especially) now entering into ECE.



Image 1: Screenshot from footage of 6-month-old Ally, her buddy teacher and mum at pick-up on first day of transition to ECE (cited in White et al., 2022).

<sup>1</sup> In Aotearoa New Zealand, and elsewhere, guidelines, research and pedagogical support concerning ECE transitions are largely focussed on transition to school.

<sup>2</sup> Funded by University of Waikato

<sup>3</sup> Some did not follow infants beyond their first 6 months in ECE; while others gained funding that enabled them to expand on the study in their own country: see <https://invisibletoddlerhood.wordpress.com/>

### i) Orienting Research Questions

1. What are the social-emotional experiences of early transitions across diverse ECE contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand? How do they 'look' across space and time?
2. What pedagogies and practices work best to support effective early transitions into, between and out of ECE?

## 2. Our Approach

A dialogic approach was applied to this study (White, 2022, in press) which meant that our emphasis was on the form-shaping dialogues that took place at each transition event – between kaiako, whānau and also by the infants (and peers). Dialogic research emphasises the potential of dialogues to shape the meanings of transition events

in consideration of: i) those who are present or not present, ii) the contexts, or spaces, in which events take place, and iii) the timing of the events, their precedents and their aftermath. We sought to understand these meanings across all transitions that took place into, between and out of ECE settings at various points of time. Data generation points were planned for at regular intervals during the initial transition to ECE (over the first 8 months), and then again at every subsequent transition point between ECE sites/spaces/rooms as well as upon entry to school. Our plan was to video capture a series of emotional and social events that took place during each 'first day' transition, recording the emotional and social experiences within these full days. The intent in doing so was to understand the meanings these transitional experiences held for others through probing dialogues with the whānau and kaiako. Table 1 summarises our research design:

| Field-work days                  | In centre observation | In centre video recordings | Pre-kaiako interview | Pre-parent interview | Post-kaiako interview | Post-parent interview |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Day 1 of first transition        | ✓                     | ✓                          | ✓                    | ✓                    | ✓                     | ✓                     |
| End of week 1 in ECE context     | ✓                     | ✓                          |                      |                      | ✓                     | ✓                     |
| Month 2                          | ✓                     | ✓                          |                      |                      | ✓                     | ✓                     |
| Month 3                          | ✓                     | ✓                          |                      |                      | ✓                     | ✓                     |
| Month 5-6                        | ✓                     | ✓                          |                      |                      | ✓                     | ✓                     |
| Month 7                          | ✓                     | ✓                          |                      |                      | ✓                     | ✓                     |
| Month 8                          | ✓                     | ✓                          |                      |                      | ✓                     | ✓                     |
| Subsequent ECE transition points | ✓                     | ✓                          |                      |                      | ✓                     | ✓                     |
| Transition to school             |                       |                            | ✓                    | ✓                    | ✓                     | ✓                     |

Table 1: Research Design

The following methods were employed:

1. **Observations** were non-participatory. They were carried out by a teacher-researcher over a series of 7-day visits to the nursery over the course of the first year, including the first day of transition when the parent leaves the child for a full or part day, and on their first day of transition to each new ECE context. Observations by eye lasted throughout the full day of the infant experience and comprised a series of emotional-social variables (see Appendix A: Observation Coding Sheet – Explanation of Variables).



Image 2: Video recording in an ECE setting

2. **Video recordings** using a small hand-held device operated by the teacher-researcher lasted in total for no more than two hours on each of the same days (Image 2). Recordings focused on the following events – the arrival and initial dropping off of the infant, a play interaction, a nappy changing interaction, a feeding interaction, peer group activities, non-structured solo activity of the infant, and the pick-up of the infant by their whānau at the end of the session.
3. **Re-probing interviews** pre-and-post-first days of transition (as above) took place with ECE kaiako and parents separately using a series of pre-prepared questions (see Appendix B: Interview Questions). We asked kaiako and parents at every transition point to evaluate each child's emotional and social characteristics (in terms of certain behaviours known from the literature and indices discovered through the collected data, and their frequency of occurrence), and compare them with the child's previous transition using selected video recordings. Kaiako were also asked to evaluate their own actions in facilitating these transitions. Interviews were undertaken by an independent researcher or teacher-researcher (i.e., not connected to the ECE setting), then transcribed independently.

4. **Teacher-researcher journals** captured the anecdotal events that took place in and around each transition from the perspective of the ‘on-the-ground’ teacher-researcher. Recordings included nuanced depictions of what happened (e.g., visitors to the setting, weather, etc).
5. **Secondary data sources** (assessment documentation, transition records, transition policies, written forms of communication in and around transitions) captured the recorded (written) dialogue exchanges that took place in and around each transition.
6. **Five-year-old emoji interviews** took place only at the final transition point two weeks prior to going to school, and two weeks after starting school. Both were conducted via the platform Zoom due to the overlap with a global pandemic. The series of emojis above were included to invite the child’s voice. (See image 3).



Image 3: Screenshot of Zoom interview with five-year-old Macy, featuring the emojis as emotional prompts.

In preparing this report three additional evaluation methods were used to identify impacts for ECE kaiako and services as at October 2021. These are as follows:

A **Mentimeter survey** was sent, from 1 August – 30 September 2021 to the ECE services involved in the study via a website link and access code. Survey responses were anonymous and were either completed by the kaiako themselves or the centre team as a whole. The survey sought feedback on the impact of the project for kaiako practices, specifically in relation to the ways the research has supported them to notice, recognise and respond to infants, toddlers, and young children’s social and emotional needs during transition into, across and out of ECE.

A **Qualtrics survey** was circulated between 13-17 September 2021, via email invitation, to a representative group of ECE colleagues across kindergarten, home based ECE, community and private education and care services and the ECE tertiary sector (lecturers and students) in Aotearoa New Zealand. They were asked to provide an evaluation on the website (<https://www.earlytransitions.com/>) developed by the research team in terms of; i) the extent to which it spoke to their priorities for ECE transitions, ii) how well it translates the research findings for the intended ECE kaiako/student audience, iii) potential end-user impact, and iv) if they would recommend the website to others and if so who. Their feedback was taken into account in the finalising of this resource. They were also invited to comment on the potential impact of this research on their practice using a three-point Likert scale alongside invitations for additional comments.

**Teacher-researcher reflections** from the data journaling were summarised during the final year of the project. Four members of the research team, who were/are also ECE kaiako, were invited to look back over the past five years of their experiences and consider the impact of the project on their practice – both in terms of their practices concerning infant transitions and skills as researchers.

### 3. Data Analysis

#### i) Quantitative Analysis:

**Observational, scaled categories** adapted from Marwick et al., (2013) were initially trialled by Jayne White and Bridgette Redder during the Aotearoa New Zealand pilot, with several adjustments made following consultation with the international ISSEET team. Additional contextual descriptive categories were incorporated to capture activities, feelings, and interactions of the transitioning focus infant. Coding was collected as it occurred (See Image 4) and after the fact via the video footage. A fine-grained statistical analysis of the observations and coded videos, capturing key social and emotional events (e.g., infant’s reaction to parent leaving, arriving etc), looked for relationships between the child’s behaviour/competences (outcome variable) and key independent variables such as level of engagement and adult/peer proximity; child’s emotional state and activity, and so on (see Appendix A: Observation Coding Sheet – Explanation of Variables). Hierarchical modelling and analysis of variance processes were applied to generate findings concerning mood and its influencing factors for this report.

Inter-observer reliability checks took place across all countries. Each observer was required to reach 80% reliability across all observations before entering the field. Training was a prerequisite for any field work undertaken and began with video coding and comparisons. Over 40 hours of training and reliability checking took place for the researchers and teacher-researchers across the life of the project.



Image 4: Teacher-researcher – Fiona Westbrook – coding in an infant ECE setting.

#### ii) Qualitative Analysis:

Thematic analysis of the interviews, teacher-researcher journals, and secondary data sources (e.g., assessment records, policy documents, written communications) – first discretely and then synthesised – was used to explore the relationship between kaiako beliefs, values and philosophies of transition, and practices, and observed infants’ experiences and behaviours. Video recordings were analysed against key variables in alliance to the observation scale, and from multiple perspectives – generating thematic insights. A series of theoretical lenses were used to push our thinking further e.g., indigenous perspectives, psychological approaches, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, Vygotsky’s sociocultural view of ‘crisis’, and Bakhtinian concepts as outlined by White (2022, in press).

### 4. Participants

Our original intention was to work with five ECE services who would be selected because they reflected the diversity and reality of infant enrolments in Aotearoa New Zealand at the time<sup>4</sup>. Each service was invited to approach the next infant whānau on their waiting list, who was aged under the age of 1-years-old and who would attend ECE for a minimum of 20 hours a week (to reflect the average hours of attendance for infants in ECE at that time. There were considerable challenges in

<sup>4</sup> When the project was initially designed 49% of under 1-year-olds were enrolled in education and care services and 20% were in home-based education (Education Counts, 2017). Similar trends were evident for our international partners and the same research design was planned for across all 6 countries in the study.

the recruitment of transitioning infants that met our brief, including: i) accessing an infant who was due to start whose ECE service, whānau and kaiako were comfortable with the level of scrutiny the research design required, ii) the additional, unanticipated, transitions (up to 4 prior to starting school) that took place for these infants, meaning that additional time was spent generating data at each transition change, and iii) availability of researchers<sup>5</sup> and teacher-researchers to complete the many hours of data generation required accordingly. It is a testimony to the relationships built within these communities that the study was completed against these parameters with four infants across multiple ECE sites.

**i) In ECE Contexts**

When each whānau agreed to participate in the study their infant became the ‘key infant’ for our investigation at each site, and across the subsequent 4-5 years. Their ‘key kaiako’<sup>6</sup>, other staff in the centre, and whānau of other children also needed to agree to participate in the study. Footage was eliminated from the data set when whānau did not consent to video data that identified their child. The consent processes thus took place at every transition point, since different participants were involved along the way – with the child and their whānau as the transitioning protagonist throughout each phase. The established relationships teacher-researchers had within their local communities meant that we were able to gain consent across every site right up until school. Table 2 outlines the details of the infants, their whānau backgrounds, and the contexts for each transition they experienced over the five years of the project. Together they reflect some of the diversity of early transitions in Aotearoa New Zealand over the time and space of this study.

**ii) Teacher-researchers**

Each ECE service was invited to nominate an in-situ teacher-researcher who was inducted into the research process and granted teacher-release funding. The rationale for this approach was that this person would cause the least disruption to the centre as they were already part of the setting in their current role. It was also felt that the skills teacher-researchers could learn were transferable to their work in ECE, with some concurrently studying in the field (Two PhDs, one Masters). Teacher-researcher responsibilities in the project were to: i) mediate between the researcher and the ECE setting concerning consent processes, ii) video and observe on transition days (and upload all data to a shared drive), and iii) participate fully in the analysis and dissemination of the findings. Where necessary they also interviewed parents and kaiako from other contexts (not their own). Full training was given to each person concerning all aspects of this role. Where an in-situ teacher-researcher was not available, an external teacher-researcher was brought in to fulfil some of these roles. Not all teacher-researchers participated in every part of this process – some generated data in-situ only, while others were involved in all aspects of the entire project. In all cases the teacher-researchers identified shifts in their practice as a consequence of their involvement in this project (see section, 5. How Much Did We Achieve?).

The additional insights teacher-researchers offered to the analysis from their ‘insider’ perspectives provided a rich surplus to the ‘outsider’ views of the Lead Researcher. Their long-held relationships within their local communities meant that the project was able to continue across settings and sustain the many challenges faced over the five years.

| Key infant and DOB  | Family  | ECE context for transition 1                                  | ECE context for transition 2                                | ECE context for transition 3  | ECE context for transition 4 | School context at age 5  |
|---|---|---|---|---|------------------------------|--|
| Aily<br>21.07.2015<br>                   | Two parent blended family, New Zealand European. Third child but first for the mother | Cambridge Early Learning Centre. Under two setting            | Cambridge Early Learning Centre. Two-three year-old setting | Cambridge Early Learning Centre. Three-five setting                   |                              | Cambridge Primary School<br>              |
| Macy<br>09.10.2015<br>                   | Two parent nuclear family. New Zealand Pakeha. Third child                            | New Shoots Children's Centre. Infant room, Tauranga           | New Shoots Children's Centre. Toddler room                  | New Shoots Children's Centre. Three-Four Setting                      | Papamoa Coast Kindergarten   | Papamoa Primary School<br>                |
| Zane<br>09.12.2016<br>                   | Two parent nuclear family. Mother immigrated from Brazil. Second child                | Inspired Kindergarten, Home-Based Education, Tauranga         | BestStart Montessori, Bethlehem, Tauranga Preschool         | BestStart Montessori Bethlehem, Tauranga Preschool 4-year-old setting |                              | Tauranga Primary School<br>               |
| Te Mahara<br>& Waikato<br>21.03.2016<br> | Single parent family. Māori. Fourth child   | Te Kohao Kohungahunga Immersion centre. Infant room/Pepe ruma | Te Kohao Kohungahunga teina ruma                            | Waahi Whaanui Kohanga Reo, Huntly                                     |                              | Te Wharekura o Rakumangamanga, Huntly<br> |

Table 2: Infants and their transition contexts

<sup>5</sup> Over the course of the study all but one of the researchers/teacher-researchers experienced changes in their employment. Originally, we had invited a Pasifika team to contribute but this was not possible in the end due to employment changes.

<sup>6</sup> By ‘key kaiako’ we mean the ECE teacher who held responsibility for settling the infant/toddler/young child into the ECE setting, often described in the international literature as ‘key teacher’ or ‘primary caregiver’ For further details see White et al., (2018).

These included:

- Geographical shifts of whānau (in one case due to difficult whānau circumstances which meant they were absent from parts of the data generation periods).
- Multiple transitions of infants (much more than the design had originally anticipated).
- Non-consenting whānau in each setting (who teacher-researchers had to maintain constant vigilance over to ensure that their rights were upheld in all phases of the project, including dissemination).
- Data storage issues when ethical agreements (which did not allow us to upload or share data easily, or where internet issues prohibited uploading).
- Last minute transitional changes (sometimes with less than 24-hour's notice).
- Changes in teacher-researcher employment circumstances (meaning they were no longer available).
- Pandemic circumstances which meant participants left the centre during lock-down 2020 (See White, Westbrook, et al., 2020).
- Unable to film or observe in the school transition (2020-21) so, instead, undertaking via the platform Zoom interviews from home).
- Institutional shifts of the lead researcher (with Bridgette Redder fulfilling an 'on-the-ground' co-lead role for two of these years).



Image 5: The teacher-research team Top left to right: Teacher-researchers Fiona Westbrook, Nikita Perks, with co-lead researcher and teacher-researcher Bridgette Redder. Bottom left to right: Teacher-researchers Kathryn Hawkes, Kat Hansen, and Waveney Lord, with Lead Researcher Jayne White (far right).

## 5. How Much Did We Achieve?

Despite the many challenges faced, we have been able to track two of the four infants right up to starting school. A third – Zane – is due to start school in January 2022 and plans are in place for pre-and-post-emoji interviews with him. The fourth infant left the study after his mother withdrew from the centre – following a second transition to the older room – due to changes in whānau dynamics and associated geographical shifts. We were unable to locate the infant or his whānau until recently when the teacher-researcher received a series of texts inviting us to tell their story. The experiences of this whānau highlight the multiple transitions that take place for young children over the first years of life – far beyond educational institutions alone. These bring additional layers of complexity and are not isolated events in the lives of many Aotearoa New Zealand children in the first years of life (Walsh et al., 2019). Exposure to and accumulation of patterns of risk factors for vulnerability is typically higher for children who identify as Māori or Pasifika ethnicity (Morton et al., 2014). For this reason, we are keen to find out more about the ways these circumstances impact on early transitions and how kaiako might best support infants *and* their whānau accordingly. We are, therefore, committed to telling this story through our research when the time is right to do so.

Notwithstanding these complex and nuanced issues, the data set is vast, spanning over 34 days of observation (an average of 6 hours per day), 68 hours of video footage and 50+ hours of interviews (all transcribed). Preliminary quantitative analysis is complete for the Aotearoa New Zealand data across each transition event prior to starting school; and within the wider international data set is currently being prepared for broader analysis over the next few months. Our intention with this data is not to compare or contrast countries or practices, but instead to identify the key features that contribute to high quality early transitions across diverse contexts. This work is currently in progress, and we expect to publish these results in 2022.

All teacher-researchers have contributed, in various ways, to publications and presentations across these years – presenting insights at the 69th OMEP World Assembly and International Conference, Croatia, 2017; to Aotearoa New Zealand Association for Research in Education in 2017 and 2021. Members of the team presented at a seminar hosted by University of Sao Paolo in Brazil in 2020, and others at Lancaster University and at the Association for Visual Pedagogies conference in 2021. Most recently the teacher/researcher spoke at the New Zealand ECE Hub – a webinar to share insights with teachers across New Zealand. (<https://theeducationhub.org.nz/ece-webinar-early-transitions-into-between-and-out-of-ece-inter-cultural-dialogues/>).

Their ongoing in-depth reflections have contributed greatly to the preparation of this report.

Whole-team meetings with teacher-researchers were held once each year of the project to share discoveries. Two of these meetings took place overseas (Brazil, 2018; Melbourne, 2019), others occurred in various locations (Tauranga, 2017; Kapiti, 2021) while others, still, occurred virtually using the platform Zoom. At these meetings teacher-researchers were asked to view video, interview, and documentation data to draw conclusions about what works, what does not, and how their practice can be further enhanced. With lead researchers, they evaluated the impact of the research on their ECE centres' practice, including changes made to ECE service policies and practices. A series of papers have now been published on topics concerning; i) the role of the key kaiako (White et al., 2018), ii) the emotional experience and expectations of parents and kaiako (White et al., 2020), and iii) the use of objects (White, Westbrook, et al., 2021), edited book is currently in production with Springer (White et al., 2022) – co-authored across the international team, focussing on infant transitions specifically.

The Aotearoa New Zealand research team contributed to research-translation resources that were developed while the lead investigator was employed at RMIT, Melbourne (see White & Hunkin, 2021), and which are now widely used by ECE kaiako in Australia. The Aotearoa New Zealand website is now developed, based on the overall analysis of the project. The website has recently been trialled with a small number of ECE services, and adjustments made prior to going live (see <https://www.earlytransitions.com/>).

## 6. How Well Did We Do It?

At the time of presenting this report we have been able to broadly respond to all of our research questions. The first two of these – concerning the social-emotional experiences of early transitions and the dialogues that take place – are discoverable in the analysis of the observational, video and interview data that was generated over the five years of the project. The final question, ‘what works best’, is answered within the synthesis of these findings encapsulated by the research team and survey responses to our website concerning potential impact.

Our key message to ECE kaiako engaging with early transitions is that the “the child is the rangatira of their transition”. By this we mean that our research has taught us of the importance of basing practices and processes of transition around the preferences and priorities of the infants, toddlers and children, as well as their whānau. The prevailing message is that infants, toddlers, and young children must lead the transition process as much as possible – its timing, processes, and priorities – in collaboration with whānau and ECE services who have the best interests of children at the centre of their actions. Paying attention to seemingly small things really does matter in this regard. Practices such as holding a hand, offering a well-timed word of encouragement, responding to non-verbal and verbal cues, or adapting policies to be more flexible, matter. We have developed a reflective koru for kaiako to consider the questions they might ask, from the perspective of the transitioning child, at each stage of their unique transition journey, as they learn about the learner. When viewed as a mana-enhancing journey, guiding principles of *relationships* and *time* orient the way transitions are planned, experienced, and reviewed as positive learning experiences for all concerned.

### i) Understanding the Social-Emotional Experiences of Early Transitions

Early transitions were shaped within and across emotional and social experiences with people, places, and things over time. For infants, toddlers, and young children they were influenced by multiple, interconnected factors that were complex and intertwined. An overall finding, to date, has been that the level of choice that can be granted to learners, and their whānau, as they enter into new spaces can play a significant role in the extent to which transitions can be emotionally and socially enhanced. An unanticipated discovery has also been the weighty impact of early transitions on kaiako who understand the importance of these events and their shaping influence, and work to respond accordingly. In the sections that follow we explore these findings systematically, drawing on the vast corpus of data now at our disposal and culminating in our assertion that positive early transitions require the efforts of many.

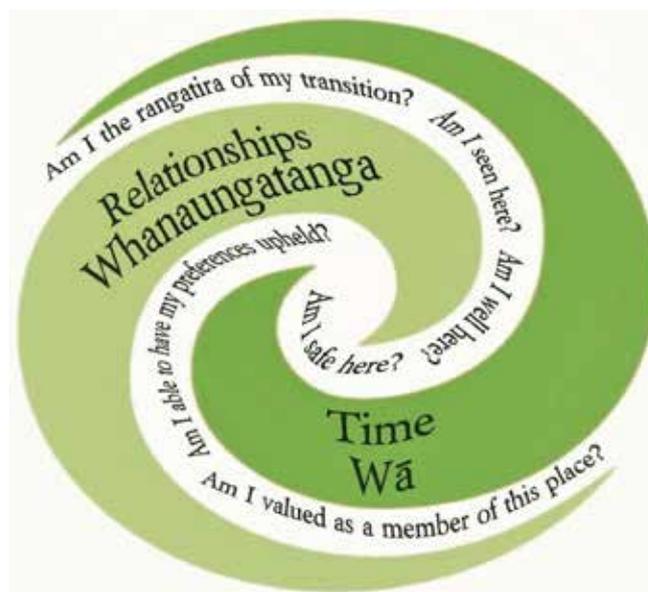
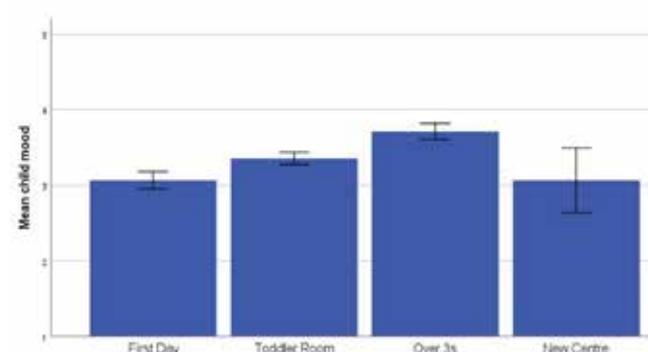


Figure 1: Reflective koru for kaiako ([www.earlytransitions.com](http://www.earlytransitions.com)).

### a) For Infants, Toddlers, and Young Children

Our analysis thus far has enabled us to identify the social-emotional experiences of our four participants at most transition points prior to starting school. These findings are further illuminated by interview notes, video excerpts and teacher-researcher observations which we integrate in the section that follows. Graph 1 summarises overall levels of mood and playfulness across each transition point – from first day as an infant, to movement to the toddler room (often in the same setting) to further transitions to over 3-year-old ECE settings. Lower levels of mood and playfulness were found on the first day to the infant setting and, again, at a new ECE service (e.g., kindergarten, Montessori). These two spaces were slightly less familiar to the child or their whānau, and hint at the importance of interconnecting spaces for positive transitions over time, and not assuming that one transition compensates for another.



Graph 1: Combined average mood on each transition day.

Our analysis thus far has further identified a series of corresponding factors of ‘people, places and things’ (what we call ‘predictors’) that influenced children’s levels of mood and playfulness throughout each of these transition points: first day into ECE as an infant, transitioning to the toddler room, over 3s and/or into a new centre. Patterns are identified across all observation events except during times when our participants are asleep. These are presented in the sections that follow.

## Significance of People

People played a highly influential role in shaping the mood of the transition for infants, toddlers, and young children. ECE kaiako were present for an overall average of 70.4% of all coded events across each day of transition. However, as Table 3 shows, the presence of the kaiako lessened on toddler and over 3s transition days, with a slight increase in the transition to a new centre. A higher percentage of kaiako presence was observed on the first day of infant transition in particular, suggesting a special role for the 'key teacher/kaiako' at this time (for further discussion see White et al., 2018).

| Transitional Day                            | Percent of observation events where a teacher was present | Percent of total time that a teacher was present |
|---|---|--|
| First Day (n = 4 children)                  | 93.0%   | 89.2%  |
| Transition to Toddler Room (n = 3 children) | 70.1%   | 69.7%  |
| Transition to Over 3s (n = 2 children)      | 57.1%   | 56.0%  |
| Transition to New Centre (n = 2 children)   | 61.3%   | 58.7%  |

Table 3: Kaiako presence on each day of transition

Peers played an increasingly significant role over time. There was a trend across all transitions towards a more positive mood and playfulness when peers were present on the first day ( $M = 4.07$ ,  $SE = 0.18$ ) than when they were not ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ;  $F(4,209) = 2.05$ ,  $p = .09$ ). Peers who transitioned 'with' infants, toddlers and young children also played an important role in creating continuity between spaces, as did siblings or whānau members who provided a source of information, support, and familiarity. Each of the ECE contexts achieved this in different ways – by having adjoining rooms, opportunities for visits, whānau rituals or mixed age learning contexts for some, or all of the day. In the image below we can see 6-month-old Te Mahara on his first day as he is introduced to his whole centre whānau by his kaiako and the older children at the centre (two of whom are his siblings).



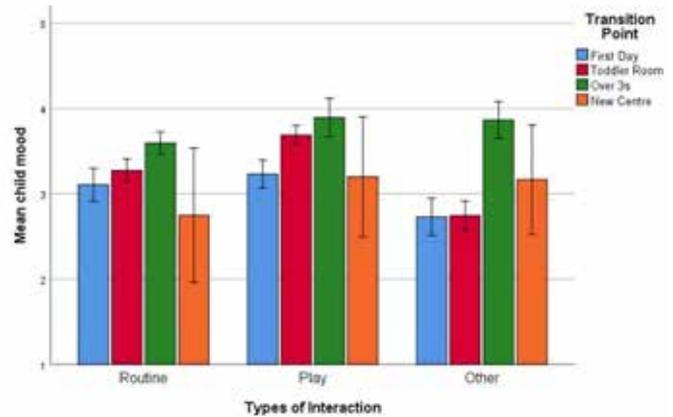
Image 6: Wā karakia (prayer session to open the day, this happens all together at the beginning of the week).

We also looked more closely at the proximity of people for the infant on their first day of transition into ECE as potentially influential factors in shaping mood and playfulness. As the people in proximity were not mutually exclusive categories in our coding (i.e., there could be both a kaiako and a peer in close proximity at the same time), three dummy variables were created to indicate the presence or absence of a kaiako, peer, or the child's mother. All three dummy variables were entered to the model simultaneously. There was a strongly significant positive effect on mood and playfulness concerning the presence of the child's mother,  $F(4,209) = 6.86$ ,  $p < .001$  in particular – clearly impacting on the social and emotional experience. When the mother left, mood often changed to lower levels of mood and playfulness in the short term.



Image 7: Two-year-old Macy, her kaiako and peers at play.

Through play experiences, however, kaiako were able to mitigate the negative impacts of the transition experience on children's wellbeing. Similar trends were evident across all transitions, as the following graph illustrates:



Graph 2: Types of Interaction Across Transition Points.

Across each transition point we found a significant effect concerning positive mood and playfulness in play interactions [ $F(2,872) = 4.40$ ,  $p < .01$ ] as opposed to routines or 'other' types of interactions (i.e. those that occurred in more structured activities or in movement between spaces) ( $M = 3.03$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ ). However, routine interactions were associated with more positive mood than 'other' types of interactions (e.g., movement between spaces or structured activities). Settling infants to sleep appeared to be the most emotionally challenging routine for the infant to adjust to on their first day into the ECE setting. Where kaiako involved whānau in decisions related to this, and other routines, positive mood was more evident. Routines offered important punctuation markers throughout the day, as is evident in the following image of two-year-old Ally on her first day to the toddler ECE setting. Previous visits to the room provide her with transition markers that tell her "Mum is coming back after lunch", and the food provides a source of sustenance and familiarity during moments of uncertainty.



Image 8: On Ally's first day of transition to the older room she is offered a sandwich at the table with her peers, which she accepts.

Routines therefore fulfilled basic needs for comfort and communication and, as a consequence, were essential for establishing a sense of well-being and belonging over time. They were especially significant for infants but also toddlers as they moved across contexts where expectations for increased independence were required. Routines were also identified by parents, during interviews, as key components of positive transitions (and, indeed, their own emotional wellbeing as a whānau). This finding is consistent with the literature concerning the importance of routines as important opportunities for learning (White, 2019). ECE kaiako told us that when these routines were in place, the transition was more likely to run smoothly as a consequence – so a lot of time was invested in understanding their significance to children and their whānau during the lead-up to first day as well as the first day itself.

### Significance of Places

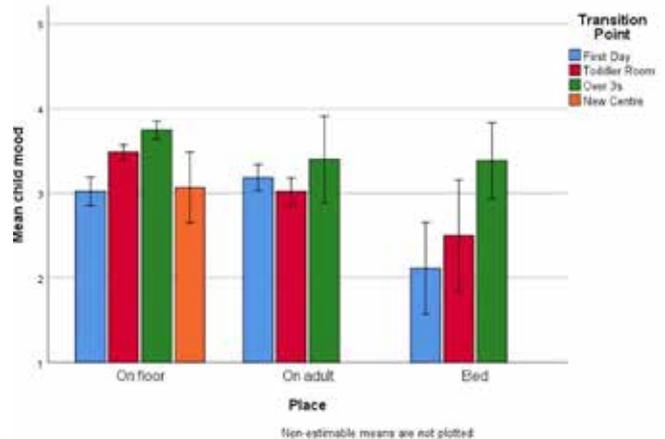
The influential role of places cannot be understated in our analysis so far. Infants, toddlers, and young children cannot always determine the places in which transitions occur. These are largely determined by adults in ECE spaces comprising indoor and outdoor areas, sleep rooms, changing tables, eating spaces, contained areas and interconnecting verandas, doors, and other entry/exit points. We found that when opportunities were granted for children to determine places of their preference, at times when they needed them, the first day was more emotionally and socially positive. There were many examples of such opportunities witnessed throughout our study – facilitated by indoor-outdoor flow, movement between spaces and flexible places for adaptive practices that responded to the priorities of the children themselves. Opportunities to move in and outdoors provided ways of connecting with peers and exploring the wider world with the familiar kaiako as a safe base to return to as needed.



Image 9: Macy independently crawls from the infant room to the older age room on her first week of transition.

Infants who were not yet mobile, however, relied almost exclusively on adults to determine the places in which their transition is located. Infants' first days into ECE were typically spent being held by or sitting on the teacher's knee as opposed to on the floor or in bed. This meant that infants needed focused attention from their kaiako, whom they relied on to feed, dress, settle to sleep, soothe when upset, support with establishing relationships, be playful and carried from place to place. On the first day of transition into ECE we found the infant's mood and playfulness was significantly more negative when they were in bed (being put to sleep or waking up) compared to when they were on the floor or when they were on an adult (e.g., on knee or being carried).

At each transition point beyond infancy, mood and playfulness was more positive when children were on the floor than when they were held by an adult. The following graph illustrates a gradual shift from the lap of an adult to a more independent location 'on floor', consistent with the developmental priorities of these different age groups. It is interesting to note the increased positive mood concerning bed for the over 3s transition (see Graph 3) – which may be a consequence of higher levels of choice concerning when to sleep.



Graph 3: Places Across Time.

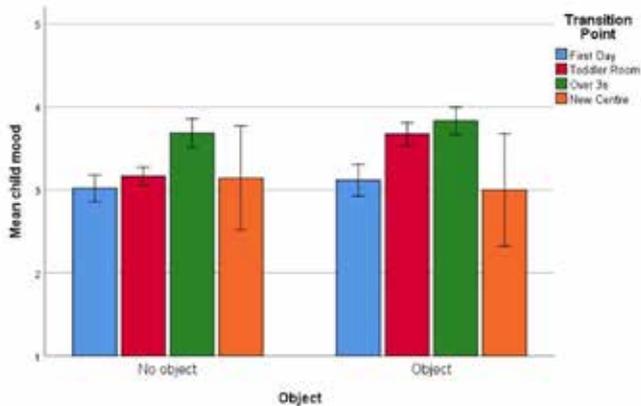
Places that enabled infants, toddlers, and young children to observe the wider ECE space from a safe vantage point seemed to play an important role in their emotional state. These were facilitated on adult laps or in contained spaces that generated feelings of safety and/or security in an otherwise potentially hectic environment. In the following image 12-month-old Macy surveys the setting on the day she transitioned to the toddler room from the confines of a cardboard box, enabling her to 'suss-out' the setting prior to her fuller engagement over time.



Image 10: Infant watches from a box.

### Significance of Things

We also found that objects played an important transitional role, offering opportunities for infants to gain a sense of the expectations of the centre, and to strengthen infant- kaiako relationships (White et al., 2021). When infants, toddlers, and young children's mood and playfulness were analysed across each transition point, we discovered that there were no significant differences in the child's mood and playfulness concerning the presence or absence of objects for infant transitions, or transitions to an over 3-year-olds room or a new centre. However, during transitions to toddler rooms, teaching practices that included an object were associated with more positive mood than practices with no object ( $p < .001$ ) as presented in the following graph.



Graph 4: Child Mood and Playfulness with Objects Across Time.

Objects and the wider landscapes of the ECE setting provided a means of brokering relationships with peers – especially when supported by the ECE kaiako, as the following image portrays:



Image 11: Ally's first day at six months.

Objects often acted as boundary items that could move across ECE contexts and provide familiar sources of comfort or familiarity. Our observations showed important relationships between the use of objects and the location of familiar adults as the following image highlights. Here we can see Macy engaging with objects in close proximity to her key kaiako who remains close by – offering a stable base for support and comfort.



Image 12: Macy explores with her key kaiako close by.

### b) Significance for Parents

At this point, we can say that early transitions clearly have social and emotional effects on whānau and key kaiako as well as infants, and that they are linked to the expectations held by both parties and their capacity to have their preferences upheld (White et al., 2020). Whānau expressed that they did not always perceive they had a choice concerning the timing of transitions to and within ECE, as a consequence of economic or ECE setting priorities. Parents' feelings of sadness or anxiety at the prospect and reality of leaving their infant upon return to work (when the infant was aged 6 months to 1 year) were ameliorated when kaiako took the time to build close relationships during pre-visits (sometimes described as playdates or pre-entry times). These facilitated negotiating dialogues that enabled the priorities and preferences of whānau to be upheld, as much as possible.



Image 13: Ally farewells her mother on her second transition.

An unexpected finding from our work was the profound role ECE kaiako played in supporting whānau. Building relationships with whānau seemed to be almost as important as those that were established with the transitioning infant, toddler, or young child. Indeed, we now see them as interconnected and, as Mika and White (2019) point out "co-constituted". We were surprised by the amount of time kaiako needed to spend with whānau and children during early transitions, and the emotional costs for them in doing so. Mood and playfulness ratings were also more positive when the mother was present ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SE = 0.22$ ) than when she was not ( $M = 3.35$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ) – indicating the importance of whānau during these early transitions.



Image 14: Zane is welcomed to the home base.

Where infants were required to engage in frequent transitions, additional negotiations were required – not only within ECE services, but between those that took place under different auspices (e.g., education and care service to kindergarten, or school). Further consideration was granted to the culture of the ECE context and the extent to which it aligned to the culture at home. Taking time to understand the meaning of a child's routines, family rituals, the significance of a name or connecting links through shared histories (and whakapapa) cannot be understated. Not only do these establish links for the child, but parents also told us that these efforts contribute to overall feelings of *ahua*, as belonging, for them. The statement "if things are good for the parent, they will be good for the child" was a persistent message we received from these whānau during interviews with both parents and kaiako.



Image 15: Te Mahara farewells his peers with his māma on his second transition.

### c) Significance for ECE Kaiako

ECE kaiako who were interviewed also found transitions to be emotionally and socially challenging. They felt that the time needed to devote to infants and their whānau was often compromised by competing priorities (e.g., too many transitioning infants at one time, not enough staff etc). One kaiako described the sadness surrounding this event as a kind of “grieving” with impacts for everyone involved, including themselves. Where ample time was able to be given to dialogues with the whānau concerning their priorities, hopes, dreams and expectations, transitions were felt to be more positive – creating what we have come to describe as ‘threads of significance’ that travelled through transitions over time. There was a strong sense of ‘getting it right’ for the child and whānau, but this often came at personal cost to the kaiako who forfeited breaks or worked longer hours in order to provide the responses they felt were needed to facilitate these levels of trust. Where ample time was granted to pre-visits, kaiako had a much greater sense of familiarity with the routines, priorities and preferences of infants, toddlers, and young children, as well as their whānau. This meant that they experienced less anxiety themselves, on the first day, as they were able to draw on this prerequisite knowledge rather than revert to assertions based on developmental need or their own preference, or convenience. As a consequence, kaiako became strong advocates for the children, and their whānau – supporting them in crossing boundaries between settings.

Kaiako spent a lot of time documenting and sharing transition procedures, experiences, and their aftermath – explaining policies, recording key moments, responding to text messages and phone calls from parents who were checking in on their child’s first day, noting down routines, and documenting learning. In this way kaiako played a role in identifying significant learning moments throughout the transition, as well as celebrating transitional milestones with the whānau.

A paper published by the research team in 2018 (see White et al, 2018) draws from the qualitative and quantitative data to show the significant role the key teacher/kaiako played in early transitions – in terms of working with the transitioning infant and their whānau. This designated kaiako across each ECE service, irrespective of context, played a pivotal role on the days leading up to, and including the first transition (as well

as its aftermath and journey into the next transition point). However, they took on a less visible role over time as the peer group and other (buddy) kaiako increasingly featured in these interactions<sup>7</sup>. We are keen to explore these practices further in alignment with the indigenous concept of *ukaipo* (Bassett, 2017), which signals a hapu approach to transition practices whereby the primary caregiver acts as a base but does not spend every minute of the day in an exclusive relationship with the infant. This approach disrupts influential Western concepts of attachments, first heralded by John Bowlby last decade, which continue to orient practice in many parts of the world today.

The key teacher/kaiako in our study were keenly attuned to the emotional and social needs of the children and whānau they worked with. They were not afraid to provide physical gestures of emotional support and quick to interpret and respond to children’s cues utilising the resources and knowledge at their disposal. Our findings reinforce existing literature that prioritises wellbeing as central to learning in the early years (Gibbons et al., 2017) and, by association, the emotionally demanding nature of responsive ECE pedagogies for kaiako (e.g., Zhang et al., 2020). This is an area for further research and policy attention warranted by concerning transitions into and within ECE contexts especially – where a great deal of time is invested by kaiako in ‘getting it right’ and often without recognition for the work that is done. Effective transitions rely on a community of people over time, not just one person in one moment or for all time.

### ii. Identifying Practices that Best Support Effective Early Transitions

Teacher-researcher reflections highlight the following key practices that they now understand to support effective transitions, and the impact on their practice as a consequence of this research:

- **Stronger engagement with whānau during transitions, to ensure that their priorities for their child are upheld as much as possible. These draw more attention to routines and peer engagement.**

*“Now knowing the importance of whānau relationships I am constantly building my relationships with parents, sharing aspects of their child’s day and seeking their dreams and wishes. In doing so I have not only got to better know the child, appreciating their wider world, I have also developed genuine relationships where whānau feel safe to open up about their concerns and be supported by my responses and adaptations to practice”.*

- **More recognition of the feelings of all concerned, and an appreciation of the lack of choice for all involved during these uncertain times, minimising these as much as possible.**

*“ISSEET has become an integral part of my pedagogy and will continue to in the future. I now find myself drawn to transitioning tamariki with intentional practices instead of uncertainty. I apply the skills and strategies I have learnt, many of which mean being more attentive to children’s socio-emotional needs. As a result, I have seen how tamariki form an especially strong bond with me.”*



Image 16: When Ally’s dad came to the centre to pick her up during her first transition, her kaiako photographed the occasion, while mum looks on.

<sup>7</sup> An exception is noted in the Home-Based Education setting where one adult was present.

- **Listening more to young learners more closely, including non-verbal cues and tuning into these as legitimate forms of communication.**

*“By taking this step back I am able to act intentionally in ways that support the transitional experiences of children, supporting their needs in the present.”*

- **Slowing down to claim increased amounts of time to sit alongside the transitioning infant/toddler/young child – at each transition point, and not as a one-off isolated event.**

*“I now know that children’s hands should be held figuratively and literally (if that is what they are seeking) to support them through their transition...By the time tamariki are ready to transition to school they are already well and truly experienced in the process of transition”.*

- **More intentional pedagogies that are specific to early transitions and which take into account contemporary research and theory.**

*“I can now speak deeply into the theoretical underpinnings of my pedagogical practice and share this with my team, and wider ECE circles. Working to know the individual, their funds of knowledge, find out what is important for them, their care routines from home, their whānau, their culture and home language; and then create similarities within our centre contexts. Through knowing, seeing, and feeling the importance for kaiako to understand their roles with transitions for tamariki, but also the important role we play in the transition for whānau.”*

- **Increased observation and analysis skills in order to notice, recognise and respond to learners and their whānau in transition, and beyond.**

*“The data analysis allowed time for me to notice exchanges such as; the numerous times the mother checked with the key teacher to ensure she understood how to prepare her baby’s bottle, the number of visits that occurred prior to the parent feeling comfortable to leave their infant, the tiny rituals that presented between all involved, the engagement of peers and siblings and their exhibited emotions as they too assisted with the transition of the new infant into their ECE environment. As a result, I have noticed my practice is now more finely tuned, I am more aware of the smallest of details within these transitions. I am more observant of the different layers of communication that are exhibited in this delicate and fragile process.”*

- **Developing more effective ‘open’ relationships with young learners as a consequence of more attuned pedagogical practices during the emotional events of transition.**

*“As kaiako, you have the privilege and responsibility to ensure that from their transition into, between and out of ECEC children know that they are valued – that what matters to them, matters to you. Pay loving attention to their emotions. Make the effort to understand what they might be feeling when they watch you through a fence feeding another baby or when they are farewelling the most important person in their life because how you respond will impact on how they respond and the meaning they gain from their transition experience.”*

- **Enhanced leadership of, and advocacy for, transition experiences within centre.**

*“As a centre manager now, I get to lead my team and share my expertise to support transitions into, across and out of our centre; supporting them, our tamariki and the whānau in our service. The knowledge that has been gathered and shared as part of this research project, the creation of the website; are taonga that I share to grow the kaiako in my centre, to support them to create timeless, relationship focussed transitions. This knowledge provides a deeper understanding and pedagogical underpinnings for kaiako practice, with more supportive transitions for whānau and tamariki” and*

*“My engagement with this project has allowed me to advocate more than ever before for effective transitions that do not marginalise the infant’s experience transitioning from home to ECE service. When I visit students on practicum our professional discussions focus more on what transition looks like, its social and emotional impact on the child, regardless of age, and provoke critical thinking around intentionality and pedagogical approach/es from which teachers draw in transition events.*

- **Increased opportunities to grant young learner’s their rights to be seen and heard.**

*“Allow the tamaiti, their funds of knowledge, and their mana to be central to the decisions. Allow each tamaiti to choose who their kaitiaki is.”*

A synthesis of our findings across interviews, observations, video and reflections highlights several important teaching practices that can make early transitions a more emotionally and socially positive experience for everyone:

- Beginning during pre-visits, tailor support to whānau and tamariki including routines and drop off strategies.
- Adapt policies to follow the lead of the learner (e.g., more frequent, and intentional visits to new settings or kaiako transitioning with them).
- Stagger paperwork in an attempt to ease whānau into settings, and stem senses of overwhelm.
- Provide opportunities to rehearse challenging transitional experiences including departures and arrivals.
- Be prepared with an awareness of routines and potential rearrangements of rosters, but also adaptively embracing uncertainty. Acknowledge that not everything always goes to plan.
- Attempt to establish collaborative relationships through playful engagement that is child centred.
- Maintain clear communication with whānau, including various strategies and platforms such as texting.
- Consider when, why and whether a transition is required, reflecting on why it is necessary and whom it serves.
- Provide consistency across spaces with important aspects sustained such as relationships and rituals in each environment.
- Be responsive rather than prescriptive, offering unhurried, supportive experiences.
- Keep assessing whether any new experiences or changes are wairua, mana and mauri enhancing.
- Enshrine tamariki autonomy, giving them space to retreat, pause and have sanctuary.
- Keep wording and actions consistent remembering the promises and expectations made, prioritising a commitment to these.
- Facilitate routines and anticipation by sharing with tamariki ritual and practices that break up the day within the new space.
- Document experiences that celebrate the transition and demonstrate tamariki progress.
- Be a support person for whānau, facilitating them with questions to ask and expectations of the new space.

## 7. Is Anyone Better Off as a Consequence?

### i) ECE Services

**Mentimeter survey responses from the participating ECE kaiako and/or their centre management** in August-September 2021 show that involvement in the research has had a positive impact on each of their ECE services and, in many cases, their wider communities. A hundred percent of survey responses indicated that engagement with the infant transition project assisted staff to better recognise the impact of transition experiences for the wellbeing of infants, toddlers, and young children into, across, and 'out of' ECE. As a consequence, the following changes were made to their ECE services:

- More emphasis on the value of pre-entry visits and their role in supporting whānau and the transitioning infant/toddler/child.
- Making more time for negotiate dialogues with adults and/or peers and listening more carefully to priorities.
- Policies were reviewed and changed to ensure more than one infant is not transitioning at the same time.
- Although policies and procedures were reviewed and changed regarding settling and transition participants commented, "but what changed most was our mindset".
- Greater attention is now paid to a consistency of routines.
- Priority is given to reinforcing stable peer groups.
- Review of all key kaiako/primary caregiver/special person processes.
- More focus on strengthening relationships with whānau as a priority: "for the child to feel a sense of wellbeing".
- Revised centre policies.
- More priority to collaborative processes for transitioning between ECE spaces – granting these more status than before.
- Greater awareness of the role of infant kaiako in the lives of infants and their whānau: "I became the rock for that parent who depended on me and had such faith in what I did ... she would say "you know her, I trust you like a mother".

**Qualtrics survey responses from anonymous representatives across the Aotearoa New Zealand ECE sector** were overwhelmingly positive about the impact of this work on their practice. 78.57% stated the website related very well to their needs concerning transition guidance, and the remaining 21.43% stated these were somewhat met. One hundred percent of responses stated they would recommend the website to others including their ECE colleagues, kaiako, students, beginning kaiako and whānau. They were particularly appreciative of the bicultural Aotearoa New Zealand emphasis that had been taken and the emphasis give to both 'into' and 'between' transitions as well as those to school, as indicated in the following quote from kaiako respondents:

- "I like that it is informative as well as the use of dual Reo".
- "It would open their eyes to allowing te ao Māori to be taught from a young age".
- "I particularly like the way that you have considered transitions into EC, within EC and to kura in three separate sections".

Further impacts were also emphasised concerning important features of transitions for ECE kaiako:

- "Insight into the importance of gentle transitions between ECE".
- "Helping to focus on children's lived experiences of transitions, appreciating the unique nature of transitions and that children increasingly experience lots of transitions from an early age".
- "Changing centre policies, playing a role in staff training and development, linking readers to other research now and in the future".

Responses also suggested that the website, and its underpinning research would be a "fantastic tool for teachers to help families, especially with children struggling with transition. It would even be an amazing tool for families to use on their own". Impact of the research for whānau is an area we wish to explore further as a consequence of the project.

### ii) Teacher-researchers

The teacher-researcher reflections, written over the final 6 months of the project in 2021, highlight the skills gained for them in terms of data generation, analysis, and dissemination:

"The skills I learnt in the collection and in particular the analysis of data has heightened my awareness of the finer details that occur within, what could be viewed as a very simple transition process".

"Being involved in this longitudinal study has improved my skills as a researcher immensely across all aspects of data collection, interobserver reliability, analysis, ethics, video editing, co-authorship and dissemination of articles. Participation in data collection across multiple ECE service contexts, being involved in meetings and writing projects with the Aotearoa and international teams, interviewing parents and children has meant I am more aware of the multiple different researcher relationships that exist within a project and value the time it takes to respond to these relationships with integrity".

With some going on to higher degrees or tertiary programmes where these insights will continue to have an impact on the wider ECE community of Aotearoa Aotearoa New Zealand:

"One of my most treasured moments of this journey was realising that for my own pedagogical practices, I had no transition models or theories that I knew or was aligned to. This led me into beginning my journey to complete my Masters in Education and laying seeds of ideas for my masters thesis"

"The programmes I teach into are enriched by the knowledge I have gained from this project ... publications written from this research comprise weekly student readings and the videos from this research provide provocations for discussion in online and face to face dialogues across undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate spaces by offering students the opportunity to engage visually with transition experiences across play, routine and other events. The Early Transitions website, especially, will provide an invaluable resource, and will be used widely across tertiary teaching programmes in NZ"

And for our indigenous teacher-researcher Waveney, the project led to increased opportunities to contribute to indigenous perspectives on the world stage:

"As a Māori teacher-researcher on an international project, I was honoured to share our Indigenous views. From being one of only two countries in the project with an Indigenous voice, it's been an honour to write articles, and chapters with this perspective. Sharing this on the International stage when we visited the University of Sao Paulo in Ribeiro Preto, Brazil."



Image 17: Waveney presenting online at the Association for Visual Pedagogies (AVP) conference 2021(White et al., 2021).

### iii) Tamariki

In our interviews with two of the five-year-old children transitioning to school so far, they selected the following three emojis to convey their emotions at this time, describing these as “worried”, “nervous”, “sad” and “happy”.



Their responses highlight the emotional experience for tamariki in making this transition. Reasons they gave for feeling “a little, a bit anxious”, “excited and sad” were because “Mumma wasn’t there”, “you actually leave Mumma”. When asked “what do you want grown-ups to know about what it feels like to go to school” one child responded:

*“Me and my mumma think about to put this thing in my pocket to keep me distracted or something like that... It would help me, I could rub it on my skin or something...It would make me feel like Mum is always gonna be there”*



Five year-old Macy told us that pre-entry school visits were “better” when an adult was present such as her kindergarten kaiako:

*“cause I knew she was gonna, she said that she’ll hold my hand for the whole day...when I hadn’t thought she was gonna be there”.... “I think a whole day (visit) would be better”*

Creating a space within the research for children to share their thoughts on transition enabled them to express how they felt through their imagining and retelling of their lived experiences. We look forward to sharing further insights when the remaining two infants are interviewed upon reaching school later this year, and to identifying the connecting threads of their social and emotional experiences of transition over time.

## 8. Summary

The outcomes of this study build on existing Aotearoa New Zealand research concerning ECE transitions to school (Cameron, 2018; Peters, 2014; Timperley et al, 2003) which locate these institutional shifts as events of great significance for Aotearoa New Zealand learners. Transitions are further prioritised in the revised Aotearoa New Zealand ECE curriculum, Te Whāriki, (Ministry of Education, 2017) which emphasises the importance of working across contexts to support children to “anticipate how different the expectations, structures and routines may be” (p. 51). In this regard, the role of the ECE kaiako is pivotal to the transition experience and places the onus on kaiako to prioritise opportunities for continuous learning through each phase of the education journey. A strength of this research project is the valuable contribution it makes to informing transitions and their continuities (and disruptions) *over time* that are inclusive of earliest experiences of entries into educational institutions prior to starting school. We have come to describe these as threads of significance that are threaded across time.

The experiences of the children we followed from infancy between 2016 and 2021 highlight the fact that transition to school is by no means the first educational transition for all Aotearoa New Zealand children. For infants and toddlers there are additional practices for kaiako to consider in realising the aspirations of Te Whāriki, and the stakes are high when these are not achieved. This project has, therefore, created space for better understanding these earlier transitions as emotional and social events over time and their relationship to well-being as a foundation

for learning (Gibbons et al, 2017). These aspects of learning are also ‘continuous’ in the sense that transitions experienced at an early age can play a part in shaping those that follow. From our five-year-old participants we have also learnt that these experiences travel with children to school, and that metaphorically and/or physically ‘holding hands’ and ‘keeping promises’ are key to all transitions across the early years – irrespective of age or context. It is therefore important for ECE kaiako to ‘get it right’.

The project has been impactful for the ECE services and teacher-researchers who have altered their practices, based on these insights, to better meet the priorities of infants, toddlers, and children, as well as their whānau. Their responses reinforce the importance of ongoing dialogues with whānau as points of negotiation which call upon kaiako to recognise that their practices extend to whānau as partners in the transition process. These insights, alongside the many that continue to be generated out of the international collaborations in the wider ISSEET project, have led to rich sharing of information concerning not only ‘what works’ but also that promote ongoing intercultural dialogues concerning ‘why’ (and importantly, ‘why not’). For this reason, we are reluctant to draw certain conclusions for all Aotearoa New Zealand kaiako, but rather to share some features held in common concerning the impact of their transition practices on wellbeing for all. We view this as an ongoing dialogue accordingly and anticipate that the website will generate further impact for the sector (if our feedback so far is anything to do by).

In presenting this report (and accompanying website) we acknowledge the small numbers of communities and contexts<sup>8</sup> involved and, for this reason, do not seek to promulgate universal solutions. Instead, we hope that the insights shared will generate further dialogues amongst teaching teams about what works, why and importantly, for whom. We are very clear that these dialogues and the actions that arise out of them must place infants, toddlers, and young children at the heart of every decision that is made during transitions. They orient kaiako not only to the ‘first day’ of movement into an educational context, but also their lead-up, their aftermath and their traces in the lives of learners across future transitions. Attention is drawn to the bicultural nature of Aotearoa New Zealand kaiako work – and of the importance of concepts of *ukaipo*, *whakapapa* and *ahua* in orienting their approaches in order to ensure that the priorities of whānau are upheld, and their mana is nurtured throughout all aspects of the transition process. Considering the extent to which the infant, toddler or young child can lead their own transition journey – as *rangatira* – lies at the heart of our discoveries. It is pedagogically and emotionally complex work that requires kaiako who are flexible, highly attuned and committed to negotiating dialogues with the priorities of whānau as well as children – even when these may differ from their own.

The messages generated out of this project are not for ECE kaiako alone. We have identified a strong need for whānau to receive support for the transitions they experience over the first five years of their child’s life – especially early ones. It is also our hope that the project findings will speak to policymakers who can now see the complex practices involved that demand the fullest attention of kaiako. In doing so we invite further (we would argue urgent) attention to features of the transition that are impacted by structural variables concerning ratios, group size, qualifications. We hope that this research goes some way to addressing the existing pedagogical gap concerning transitions for learners *before* they commence school, and the pedagogical threads across time that support positive experiences in this regard. Our research has reinforced the importance of contemplating early transitions that take into account the socio-political conditions that can constrain choices for children, whānau and/or ECE services concerning ECE timing, access, quality and so on. Economic factors impacting the leave provisions offered to Aotearoa New Zealand whānau are a primary driver in

<sup>8</sup> In particular we recognise the absence of Pasifika ECE services in the study for reasons explained earlier.

determining (or, in some cases, constraining) ECE choices and appear to be driving many of the existing processes. We therefore see that emotionally and socially optimal early transitions are a priority for Aotearoa New Zealand society, not merely ECE services. There is much yet to do as we continue to work with the rich data source now at our disposal, the networks established, and the insights generated.

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### ii) What's Left to Do

- Emoji-inspired zoom interviews with two of the five-year-olds, concerning their emotional and social experiences upon starting school.
- Springer book of *Infant Transitions from International Perspectives to be completed* (2022).
- Further qualitative analysis of all interviews across each transition using the software NVivo – generating themes across parent, kaiako, and child perspectives before and after transitions (2022).
- Quantitative analysis of variables impacting social and emotional well-being of infants, toddlers, and young children in transitions over time – international perspectives (2021-22).
- Sharing whānau narratives based on interviews.
- Two Aotearoa New Zealand-based papers to be prepared highlighting key findings for 'in between' and 'to school' transitions for children, kaiako, and whānau (including a close look at the notion of 'ukaipo') (2022).
- One methodological paper concerning the use of emojis in interviews with children and the concept of 'great time' in transitions for ECE (2022).
- We will continue to translate our findings for the ECE sector and whānau via infographics, memes (see Westbrook et al., 2021) video and other visual means, through social media (2023).
- We will be seeking further funding to support this translation work.
- We have recently learnt that an infant from ISSEET Australia is re-locating to New Zealand. We will be picking up on her experience as she enters an ECE centre in the Wairarapa in 2022.

We seek to attract additional funding to support a PhD student and a summer scholar to work with further data analysis at University of Canterbury 2022-23.

## Our Institutional Partners

Institutional members of the ISSEET team:



Strathclyde University (Scotland)  
University of Sao Paulo (Brazil)  
Jyvaskyla University (Finland)  
The University of Arkansas (USA)  
RMIT University (Australia)  
University of Waikato (2015-18)  
University of Canterbury (2021)

All queries to: Professor E. Jayne White –  
jayne.white@canterbury.ac.nz

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The statistical services of Megan Gath at University of Canterbury's Well-Being Centre have added rich layers of analysis and insight (with more to be done over the next few months). Media and communications guidance by our website designer – Courtney White – has played a significant role in targeting our research translations to our intended audience for maximum impact.

Ultimately, however, none of this would be possible without the children, their whānau, kaiako, and peers to whom we owe a debt of gratitude and, in consideration of all we have learnt from them, our deepest respect for all their Becomings. This project is dedicated to you.

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## Appendix A: Observation Coding Sheet – Explanation of Variables

(White, et al, 2022, in press)

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>DoB</b>   | <b>dd.mm.yyyy</b>   |
| <b>Participant (this will occupy several columns)</b>  | <b>Sex</b>  |
| <p>Please only use numeric scores on the Excel:</p> <p>0= No (not present)<br/>1= Yes (present during that obs time)</p> <p>Instructions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Use as many columns as you have Participants</li> <li>· Put each Participant on a separate column</li> <li>· Note each Participant's presence by inserting in the relevant cell either:<br/>1 (for Yes, participant is present) or<br/>0 (for No, participant is not present).</li> <li>· At the end, provide a clear description for each of your codes, at the bottom of your excel file</li> </ul> | <p>Please only use numeric scores on the Excel:</p> <p>1- Male<br/>2- Female<br/>3- Not disclosed/known</p>   |
| <b>Interaction Description</b>   | <b>Interaction</b>  |
| Use text   | <p>Only use numeric scores on the Excel:</p> <p>1 = Routine<br/>2 = Play<br/>3 = Other (with explanation note)</p>  |
| <b>Object</b>  | <b>Place</b>  |
| <p>Please only use numeric scores on the Excel:</p> <p>1 = no object<br/>2 = bottle/ eating<br/>3 = object<br/>4 = nappy / changing clothes</p>  | <p>Please only use numeric scores on Excel:</p> <p>1 = on the floor (i.e. not sitting on adult)<br/>2 = on adult (i.e. either on knee or being carried)<br/>3 = bed</p> |
| <b>Activeness</b>  | <b>Involvement</b>  |
| <p>Where</p> <p>1 – low levels of...<br/>5 – high level of ...<br/>0 = for “sleeping/asleep”</p>   | <p>Where</p> <p>1 – low levels of...<br/>5 – high level of ...<br/>0 = for “sleeping/asleep”</p>  |
| <b>Mood &amp; Playfulness</b>  | <b>Engagement</b>   |
| <p>Where</p> <p>1 – high level of negative mood<br/>5 – high level of positive mood<br/>0 = for “sleeping/asleep”</p>  | <p>Where</p> <p>1 – low levels of...<br/>5 – high level of ...<br/>0 = for “sleeping/asleep”</p>  |

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

|  |   |
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| <p><b>Parent interview 1:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Can you tell us a little bit about you and your infant- socially, emotionally? Why childcare? Why now?</li> <li>2. What are your expectations for yourself and your infant concerning this transition (hopes and dreams)?</li> <li>3. What are the most important things you want this centre to know about your baby, and why?</li> <li>4. What has happened so far? [delve into details concerning enrolment, visits, administrative requirements etc]</li> <li>5. Any additional information?</li> </ol>  | <p><b>Teacher interview 1:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is your background as an infant teacher? How do you see your role with this infant and family?</li> <li>2. What are your expectations for this transition – for this infant, family, and the centre (e.g., protocols, routines, administrative requirements etc)</li> <li>3. What do you already know/feel/think about this infant – socially, emotionally? What are your predictions for this transition experience?</li> <li>4. What do you consider is the most important aspect(s) of transition? Why?</li> <li>5. Any additional information?</li> </ol>   |
| <p><b>Parent interview 2:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How have you found the first few months of this transition?</li> <li>2. What has been most important for you in [infants] social and emotional experience over this time? Your own?</li> <li>3. Have you noticed any changes?</li> <li>4. Have there been any surprises? challenges?</li> <li>5. What about relationships with staff? peers?</li> <li>6. [show selected video footage of both and invite discussion about these relationships]</li> <li>7. What would you say were the most important factors in making the transition experience successful/positive based on your experiences to date? What would you do differently and what would you uphold in terms of practices or protocols?</li> <li>8. Anything else? [if there were any big issues raised last time, revisit these]</li> </ol>  | <p><b>Teacher interview 2:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How have you found the first few months of this transition?</li> <li>2. Have there been any surprises for you?</li> <li>3. Challenges?</li> <li>4. What are the most important aspects of [infants] transition for you right now?</li> <li>5. Do you see any shifts in terms of [infants] experiences – play, routines, social – peer group etc?</li> <li>6. [show video of a routine, play and relational event and invite discussion about its significance; show time sample information over this period and invite comment]</li> <li>7. How (do you think) has your relationship and that of other staff altered over this period in relation to this infant?</li> <li>8. Have you taken on responsibility for any other infants since this infant began? How is this managed?</li> <li>9. What do you think is most important for [infant] socially/emotionally right now?</li> <li>10. [may draw on assessment information e.g., 'what next' steps]</li> <li>11. Do you see a transition for yourself too?</li> <li>12. Anything else? [if there were any big issues raised last time, revisit these]</li> </ol>                                      |
| <p><b>Parent interview 3 &amp; subsequent transitions across ECE</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How have you found the first few months of this transition?</li> <li>2. What has been most important for you in [infants] social and emotional experience over this time? Your own?</li> <li>3. Have you noticed any changes?</li> <li>4. Have there been any surprises? challenges?</li> <li>5. What about relationships with staff? peers?</li> <li>6. [show selected video footage of both and invite discussion about these relationships]</li> <li>7. What would you say were the most important factors in making the transition experience successful/positive based on your experiences to date? What would you do differently and what would you uphold in terms of practices or protocols?</li> <li>8. Anything else? [if there were any big issues raised last time, revisit these]</li> </ol> | <p><b>Teacher interview 3 &amp; subsequent transitions across ECE:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How have you found the first few months of this transition?</li> <li>2. Have there been any surprises for you?</li> <li>3. Challenges?</li> <li>4. What are the most important aspects of [infants] transition for you right now?</li> <li>5. Do you see any shifts in terms of [infants] experiences – play, routines, social – peer group etc?</li> <li>6. [show video of a routine, play and relational event and invite discussion about its significance; show time sample information over this period and invite comment]</li> <li>7. How (do you think) has your relationship and that of other staff altered over this period in relation to this infant?</li> <li>8. Have you taken on responsibility for any other infants since this infant began? How is this managed?</li> <li>9. What do you think is most important for [infant] socially/emotionally right now?</li> <li>10. [may draw on assessment information eg 'what next' steps]</li> <li>11. Do you see a transition for yourself too?</li> <li>12. Anything else? [if there were any big issues raised last time, revisit these]</li> </ol> |

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| <p><b>Child to school interview 1:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do you feel about leaving your centre? (pick an emoji card)</li> <li>2. How do you feel about starting school? How do you think you will feel? (pick an emoji card).</li> <li>3. What do you imagine your first day of school will be like? What will you be doing when you get there? (images of school). How do you think you will feel? (pick an emoji card for each image selected)</li> <li>4. Is there anything you imagine might be fun about school? (may choose card)</li> <li>5. Is there anything you imagine might be scary/tricky about school? (may choose card).</li> <li>6. What do you imagine your teacher will be like? (turn to image of teacher in photobook). How do you think you will feel? (pick an emoji card)</li> <li>7. What do you imagine your classroom will be like? (invite child to describe or draw their thoughts) How do you think you will feel? (pick an emoji card)</li> <li>8. What do you imagine it will be like when you are eating your lunch? (image of lunch routine) How do you think you will feel? (pick an emoji card)</li> <li>9. What do you imagine it will be like when you are playing with friends? (image of school playground). How do you think you will feel? (pick an emoji card)</li> <li>10. What do you imagine it will be like when you are learning how to ... read, do maths, know letters, learn words ... etc (array of images). How do you think you might feel? (pick an emoji card)</li> <li>11. How do you think mummy/daddy/grandma/dad will feel (turn to generic image of a family member mummy/daddy/grandma etc in photobook and pick an emoji card)</li> </ol> | <p><b>Child at school interview 2:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What did it feel like when you left your centre? (turn to image). How do you feel? (pick an emoji card)</li> <li>2. What was your first day of school like? (image). What did it feel like on that first day of school? (pick an emoji card)</li> <li>3. Is there anything that might be fun about school? (images to select from).</li> <li>4. Is there anything that might be scary/tricky about school? (image to select from).</li> <li>5. What did it feel like when you saw your teacher? (turn to image of teacher in photobook, pick an emoji card)</li> <li>6. What did it feel like when you saw your classroom? (turn to image of classroom in photobook, pick an emoji card)</li> <li>7. What did it feel like when you ate your lunch at school? (image of lunch area, pick an emoji card)</li> <li>8. What is it like playing with friends? (image). How do you feel when you play with friends? (pick an emoji card)</li> <li>9. What did it feel like when you were learning how to ... read, do maths, learn words ... etc (array of images, pick an emoji card)</li> <li>10. How do you think mummy/daddy/grandma/dad are feeling about you being at school (turn to image of mummy/daddy/grandma etc in photobook and pick an emoji card)</li> </ol> |
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Parent and teacher interviews carried out two weeks prior and two weeks after the child formally transitions to school. Minor adjustments have been made to the interview questions for parents and teachers:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Parent to school interview 1:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Can you tell us a little bit about you and your child now – socially, emotionally? Why did you choose this school? Why now?</li> <li>2. What are your expectations for yourself and your child concerning this transition (hopes and dreams)?</li> <li>3. What are the most important things you want this school setting to know about your child, and why?</li> <li>4. What has happened so far? [delve into details concerning enrolment, visits, administrative requirements etc]</li> <li>5. Any additional information?</li> <li>6. What effect, if any, has the covid-19 pandemic had on your child's transition to school?</li> </ol> | <p><b>Parent at school interview 2:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How have you found the first two weeks of this transition?</li> <li>2. What has been most important for you in [child's] social and emotional experience over this time? Your own?</li> <li>3. Have you noticed any changes?</li> <li>4. Have there been any surprises? challenges?</li> <li>5. What about relationships with staff? peers? objects?</li> <li>6. What would you say were the most important factors in making the transition experience successful/positive based on your experiences to date? What would you do differently and what would you uphold in terms of practices or protocols?</li> <li>7. Anything else? [if there were any big issues raised last time, revisit these]</li> </ol> |
|---|---|

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Teacher to school interview 1:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is your background as a primary school teacher? How do you see your role with this child and family?</li> <li>2. What are your expectations for this transition – for this child, family, and the school (e.g., protocols, routines, administrative requirements etc)</li> <li>3. What do you already know/feel/think about this child – socially, emotionally? What are your predictions for this transition experience?</li> <li>4. What do you consider is the most important aspect(s) of transition? Why?</li> <li>5. Any additional information?</li> <li>6. What effect, if any, has the covid-19 pandemic had on this child's transition to school?</li> </ol> | <p><b>Teacher at school interview 2:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How have you found the first two weeks of this transition?</li> <li>2. Have there been any surprises for you?</li> <li>3. Challenges?</li> <li>4. What are the most important aspects of [child's] transition for you right now?</li> <li>5. Do you see any shifts in terms of [child's] experiences – play, routines, social – peer group etc?</li> <li>6. How (do you think) has your relationship and that of other staff altered over this period in relation to this child?</li> <li>7. What do you think is most important for [child] socially/emotionally right now?</li> <li>8. [may draw on assessment information e.g., 'what next' steps]</li> <li>9. Do you see a transition for yourself too?</li> <li>10. Anything else? [if there were any big issues raised last time, revisit these]</li> </ol> |
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## Appendix C: Research translation example from ECP work with RMIT

### Five Principles for Effective Infant Transitions to Early Childhood Education and Care

- 1 Communicate honestly**  
 Early transitions may be *challenging* for you. Parents need to be informed about how their infant is doing – even when things are difficult.
- 2 Make time to connect**  
 Touch, Talk, Play, Sound, Explore. Quick distractions don't help babies feel settled.
- 3 Make space for grief**  
 Early transitions sometimes have *real* emotions for infants. You can be with them in their sadness by *acknowledging* them and acknowledging their feelings.
- 4 Treat all educators as key teachers**  
 All educators in the infant room can start to build connections with the infant and family – key teachers don't need to be able to *play* with the infant for all of every day.
- 5 Early transitions affect everyone**  
 It's important to recognise that transitions are emotional and effortful for *everyone* involved: families, infants and educators.

**Research suggests that educators are most effective when they are able to:**

- Take time out for themselves; communicate with parents regularly; respond to infant rhythms; stay up to date with current research.
- Rest & Recharge
- Plan & Communicate
- Follow Routines
- Current Research

**Expectations and emotions concerning infant transitions to ECEC: international dialogue with parents and teachers**

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## Appendix D: Observation Sheet

Name of infant: \_\_\_\_\_

ICOMs: teacher (see proximity) \_\_\_\_\_

SWT: baby, teacher (see proximity) \_\_\_\_\_

Room: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

KT: Any teacher

BT: buddy teacher

OT: other teacher

PT: peer teacher

PTJ: peer older / girl

PTB: peer sibling

PTCS: peer older sibling (NOT enrolled)

PTC: peer cousin

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Age range (in days): \_\_\_\_\_

Group participating in this study: \_\_\_\_\_

| Time Unit | Participant | Type of interaction | Description (based on a table of ICOMs) | Place (see last column) | Object (see last column) | Initiative | Response | Infant's engagement | Infant's mood / preference |
|-----------|-------------|---------------------|---|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------|----------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| 10:35:10  | SWT         | P                   | Placing in nappie                       | 1                       | 1                        | 2          | 2        | 2                   | 3                          |
| 10:40:13  | KT          | P                   | KT asks to change nappie                | 1                       | 2                        | 3          | 2        | 2                   | 3                          |
| 10:40:23  | KT          | A                   | KT asks to change nappie                | 1                       | 3                        | 1          | 3        | 1                   | 3                          |