ECE Participation Programme Evaluation

Stage 4

Report to the Ministry of Education

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Executive Summary

This report is from the fourth and final stage of an evaluation of the Ministry of Education’s (MOE) ECE Participation Programme. The overall evaluation focus is on how the Participation Programme and individual initiatives addressed barriers to participation in early childhood education (ECE) for priority groups in target communities.

The Stage 3 evaluation report integrates findings across the first three stages. The focus in this final stage of the evaluation is on families enrolled in the Engaging Priority Families initiative, an intensive support programme for 3 and 4 year-olds and their families/whānau, aimed at leading to enrolment in ECE, regular participation in ECE, support for learning at home and a successful transition to school. It focuses on families who have a 3 or 4 year old who is not enrolled in early childhood education, identify as Māori or Pasifika, or are from low socioeconomic homes. This initiative offers support from the EPF coordinator to ensure and support attendance at ECE, working with families who are least likely to have participated in ECE without the Participation Programme.

The main aims for Stage Four of the evaluation were “to focus entirely on learning outcomes for children, and specifically to get priority children’s stories of engaging in the Participation Programme, the outcomes of ECE participation for them and their families, and information about their transitions to school”. The research questions were:

1. **Participation**: what did the child’s participation in EPF and ECE look like?
   i. How did the whānau’s approach to participation support the child’s participation?
   ii. In what ways did the whānau’s approach to participation change as a result of being in EPF?

2. **Learning Outcomes**: what learning foundations did the child develop during the time they participated in EPF and ECE?
   i. What support (from ECE and EPF) helped the child develop strong learning foundations?
   ii. If learning foundations are not strong, what additional support (from ECE and EPF) might have helped the child develop stronger learning foundations? NB support to child from whānau included in EPF and ECE support, and could be discussed as a strand of this where relevant.

3. **Transition**: How did the child experience transition to school?
   i. In what ways did the EPF and ECE settings support the child’s early months at school?
   ii. How did ECE support of the child contribute to ease (or not) of transition to school?
   iii. How did EPF support of the child and whānau and brokerage role support the ease (or not) of transition to school? NB support might be specific transition preparation or regular ECE/EPF activities.
   iv. How did the school and new entrant teacher contribute to the ease (or not) of transition to school?
   v. How did the learning foundations developed in the EPF and ECE settings by the child and whānau support the child’s early months at school?

A study was undertaken over a six month time span to examine the early learning experiences of 18 EPF children in ECE and their transition to school, and how ECE and EPF had contributed to strengthening children’s learning
foundations and supporting the transition. One child was not included in the analysis for privacy protection reasons. Perspectives and documented information about the child’s participation, learning and development were gathered from each child’s whānau, EPF coordinator, ECE head teacher/supervisor and primary school new entrant teacher. Observations in the child’s early childhood setting gathered data about short learning episodes. These were analysed in relation to the ECE Curriculum Framework, Te Whāriki. The observations were also used in interviews with the new entrant teachers as examples of what we saw happening in ECE, to ask whether these were happening in school. The child’s transition to school experience was mapped against the Key Competencies in the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC). The study examined whānau experiences of participating in EPF, ECE and the early months of school, and how these contributed to involvement with the child’s learning at ECE and school, and at home.

**Participation and learning foundations**

Sixteen of the 18 case study children had not attended any ECE before participating in the EPF programme. Most of these would not have enrolled their child without the help of the EPF coordinator who also encouraged and supported their attendance. All children in the study had regular or mainly regular attendance in ECE for between 18 and 30 hours per week, except for a child enrolled in Te Kura who learned at home. Several families were referred to EPF by external agencies, a finding that reinforces the importance of EPF coordinators having connections with a range of family services in the community. Ten of the 18 children came to their service by van. Two families became actively involved in contributing to the ECE programme. One of these parents participated in playgroup activities as is expected in a playgroup and the other supported her son in the programme provided through Te Kura. The engagement with EPF and the decision to enrol their child in ECE supported many parents in their parenting and the child in their learning and development.

We focused on Te Whāriki strands in gauging children’s learning foundations, especially indicators chosen as particularly significant for a strong platform for learning and successful transitions to new situations. These were:

- **Wellbeing:** Confidence; determining own actions, making own choices; knowledge, skills and attitudes to keep selves safe and healthy; teacher and parent rating that child is “ready” for school.
- **Contribution:** Working, playing collaboratively with others (socialisation and caring); strategies for relating to others; respect for others; taking responsibility.
- **Belonging:** Engagement; persistence with difficulty.
- **Exploration:** Developing working theories; enthusiasm for exploring the environment actively.
- **Communication (non-verbal and verbal communication becoming more complex; familiarity and enjoyment with reading, writing and mathematics; familiarity and enjoyment in being creative and expressive).**

All children in our sample were described or observed to be developing positive learning foundations while participating in ECE and EPF. One group of five children was categorised as having strong learning foundations across nearly all the strands of Te Whāriki (two of these children had a way to go on exploration indicators). Nine children had very positive learning foundations, especially related to communication, and still a way to go in terms of some Te Whāriki strands. A third group of four children had slightly positive learning foundations and a way to go in terms of all Te Whāriki strands (see Table 3, p. 22).

Communication was given most prominence and focus, and is in keeping with ideas that communication is linked to the principle of empowerment. Communication is vital for children to be able to contribute their strengths and
interests, to find out what they want to know, and to take increasing responsibility for their own learning and care, hence underpinning the child as an independent learner on entering school. Particular emphasis was placed on reading, writing and mathematics in line with parent wishes and teacher views that this would support school transition. Wellbeing was also strongly encouraged by most EPF coordinators and ECE services, and the ability to care for one-self was an attribute that new entrant teachers found helpful in the school classroom. In keeping with some other studies (Education Review Office, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2015), indicators of exploration were less common in documentation, interview comments or observations for the case study children.

Most children had ear, vision and health checks while they were in ECE. Subsequently three children had access to specialist support. One child, Aaron, was receiving Group Special Education support for autistic–like behaviour. However, three children not checked in ECE appeared to have health issues that were not identified by ECE teachers or EPF coordinators, including hearing and vision (subsequently identified at school), speech difficulties, and a learning disorder. This is concerning since delays in diagnosis and treatment/intervention would be likely to have impacts on children’s learning and development at the time and throughout their life. More could have been done in ensuring appropriate and timely checks for these children while they were in ECE.

The months of attendance in ECE were related to positive learning foundations. All children who were in the “strong foundations” group had attended ECE for more than six months; five children in other groups had less than six months attendance, suggesting more time in ECE could have been useful. Children who had attended for less time had not been in the EPF programme for long.

Having opportunities for social interactions with other children and adults seemed to contribute to children’s social competence. The EPF coordinator played a role in encouraging parents of three children in home-based settings to move to kindergarten before school in order to have opportunity to engage with a bigger group of children and adults. Reportedly, the kindergarten experience supported social development and “readiness” for school. Similarly, the EPF coordinator for a child enrolled in Te Kura encouraged the mother to participate in community activities, as well as providing considerable support for Te Kura activities. However, opportunities for social interaction were not taken up by this family to a wide extent.

A pivotal factor in supporting children’s learning was the understanding and interactions of the ECE teachers/educators. Intentional teachers who “noticed, recognised and responded to” valued learning seemed better able to extend learning and articulate it to others through for example assessment documentation. Examples were gathered where teachers/educators purposely focused their pedagogical approaches and assessment documentation to strongly support valued outcomes identified as important to the child’s development and family wishes. The assessment portfolios, even over only a short period of time, showed a breadth and depth of learning across the strands of Te Whāriki. Family engagement and contribution were documented too and given recognition and value. Portfolios and teacher interview data about children in the only slightly positive group pinpointed a narrower range of learning and gave less individualised commentary about teaching and learning for specific children.

Finally, the educational activities parents did with their children seemed to make a difference to children’s learning. There was variability in the learning activities said to be carried out in the home setting, in the input of the EPF coordinator to home learning, and in the information about learning gained from the ECE setting for the 13 families where children had less strong learning foundations. Some EPF coordinators played a key role in formulating goals with the family and suggesting activities focused on learning. Parents found out about their children’s learning in the ECE setting by observing activities, having information conveyed by the ECE teacher through documentation and talking, or through the EPF coordinator telling the parent about the child’s day. The
role of the EPF coordinator as a conduit for information was particularly evident for some families whose children were transported by van to the ECE setting. Some early childhood service teachers/educators invited parental contribution to assessment and the programme. The child’s own enjoyment, interest and progression, derived especially from the ECE experience was a driving force for initiating and sustaining home activities. In combination, these findings suggest the powerful role of all parties in achieving educational aims.

**Transition to school**

Children’s transition to school was mapped against the Key Competencies of the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC). The Key Competencies and indicators were:

1. **Managing self:** child is settled and happy within a week; manages own needs; adjusts to routines (e.g. puts clothes on peg, follows teacher instructions); is described as “ready” for school; child is confident.
2. **Relating to others:** Co-operative interactions with others; cares for others.
3. **Participating and contributing:** Child is confident to express a view; contributes; is engaged; perseveres with difficulty.
4. **Thinking:** Working theories; problem solving.
5. **Using language symbols and texts:** Familiarity and enjoyment reading, writing and mathematics. Creative and expressive.

In summary, children in the study had a range of transition experiences. One group of four children experienced transition as very positive in the way they settled and their classroom work. One group of six children experienced reasonably smooth transitions but had some issues in classroom work. One group of three children did not settle quickly, displayed challenging behaviour and experienced challenges in classroom work. Four children left for another city and one child stayed in ECE.

The processes occurring that might be expected to support transition; school visits, health and Before School Checks, information sent to school, were variable, and were supported to different extents by the parents, EPF and ECE settings. Nine of the 13 children who remained in the study had school visits before enrolment, organised by their ECE setting except for one child whose mother took the child on the visit after discussion with the EPF coordinator and ECE. Some visits were not to the school the child subsequently attended but were thought to be useful in building familiarity with school. Two of the four children who had no visits had relationships with other children attending or with their new entrant teacher – these supported transition. Health and Before School Checks were organised by the ECE setting for eight children and by Plunket for two children. ECE teachers did not know whether two of the remaining three children had these checks; one child had no checks. The role played by the ECE setting was on a continuum from ensuring timely vision, hearing, dental, Before School and other checks (e.g. assessment of special needs) to not organising or finding out about any health checks. Some EPF coordinators played a role in supporting health checks, such as discussing these with the parent and arranging transport. Only five of the ECE centres or parents passed on children’s portfolios to schools; four new entrant teachers commented that this would be helpful in building understanding of the child. Parents were the main people who talked to the new entrant teacher about their child if they had opportunity. All ECE settings said they had some kind of transition programme, ranging from a focus on particular skills thought to assist transition, to development of a transition portfolio and regular visits to take part in the local school programme and library.

EPF coordinators generally saw their role as making sure the child was enrolled at a school, and encouraging a school visit, but they tended not to be in direct contact with the school themselves. The aim was for families to
take on this responsibility as once the child had been in school three months contact with EPF would finish. All but two EPF coordinators said they played an active role in discussing the enrolment process with parents and potential schools. One of the two coordinators not doing this thought this was an ECE responsibility; the other did not give much detail in her interview. In addition, some EPF coordinators gave more specific support. This included checking that planned visits happened, giving advice on funding, supplying resources, directly talking to the school principal, and developing a transition plan in discussion with the parent. Some coordinators stayed in close contact with families after school enrolment, but feedback from families indicates that others were quite casual about an arrangement, leaving it up to parents to contact them. While families did not express any concerns in these situations, closer contact may have supported smoother transition in some instances.

Once in school, new entrant teachers emphasised children having strength on the Key Competencies of Managing Self, Using Languages Symbols and Texts and Relating to Others as supporting transition. Self-care was viewed as important; a finding that reinforces the value of children being able to take care of their belongings, manage their lunch box and dress themselves. Strong learning foundations developed in the EPF and ECE settings by the child supported them in the early months of school. All four children who had a very positive transition experience were also rated strong across the strands of Te Whāriki. Children had more favourable transition experiences where new entrant teachers noticed, recognised and responded to children’s strengths and supported these in the classroom. Some teachers recognised children’s proficiency in two languages and made a cultural bridge to support transition. Parents were involved in communicating with the school and supporting their child’s learning. In these instances, there was continuity of expectations and understandings in the ECE, home and school settings. Conversely, where patterns of strength seen and documented in ECE were not recognised in the new entrant classroom, children experienced challenges.

Overall, an integrated approach to transition where parents, EPF, ECE and the school acted together to support the child’s transition to school seemed to be very beneficial. These findings highlight the importance of the major players in children’s lives working together with shared aims around transition.

**Conclusion**

This study examined the learning foundations and transitions to school of children whose families participated in the Ministry of Education Engaging Priority Families initiative. Overall, we conclude that participation in EPF made a difference for children and families in brokering access to ECE; supporting the development of positive learning foundations prior to school start; and in easing the transition pathway to school. However, there were variations in experience, which are examined in more depth in the conclusion at the end of the report, together with suggestions on what more could be done to help children and families around development of learning foundations and in transition to school.

Participation in ECE made a difference for the children in this study. Throughout the evaluation, EPF coordinators have been shown to have a powerful role in enabling participation; gaining parents’ trust and supporting the child’s enrolment and attendance in ECE. Regular attendance of between 18 and 30 hours per week for at least six months was associated with strong learning foundations and made possible through EPF coordination, although duration of attendance was not the only or main contributing factor (some children attended longer but had less rich opportunities for learning and development).

All children developed positive learning foundations across at least some of the strands of Te Whāriki while attending ECE; some more strongly and over wider domains than others. Communication was emphasised as being of crucial importance by parents and teachers/educators, most particularly oral communication and good listening skills, and enjoyment of reading and writing, alongside basic skills of counting, identifying letters and
writing one’s own name. All strands of Te Whāriki link to dispositions that are important for holistic learning and development, but some had lesser emphasis in interview and portfolio documentation for some children, and the strength of their learning foundations varied. For example, the study found a more limited focus on exploration and working theories, consistent with other evidence (Hedges & Jones, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2015) that the concept of working theories has been less well developed by practitioners than learning dispositions. Further, educational activities parents did at home and their contribution to the ECE programme made a difference to children’s learning. These were supported by EPF coordinators usually through provision of resources and ideas, and ECE services through modelling and support. However, the teaching and learning approaches of teachers/educators were variable. In our small sample, the importance of pedagogical approaches was very evident. The early childhood services that contributed to positive child and family outcomes were generally characterised by teachers/educators who recognised possibilities for extending individual children’s learning and development, and intentionally scaffolded learning. They worked from a strengths based approach as seen in documented assessments where the teacher/educators’ focus on valued outcomes for each individual child were evident.

EPF coordinators’ role in transition was most commonly in the background working with parents to make sure they made a decision about which school their child might attend, how to go about enrolling the child, and encouraging parents to take their child on school visits before actual attendance. Most coordinators followed up to check that visits had occurred, either with ECE services or parents; one EPF coordinator went on a school visit with a child. When parents visited schools with the children before enrolment, they sometimes did not meet the new entrant teacher who would teach their child; rather the “office lady” or principal. Two parents were deterred from either visiting the classroom pre-enrolment or staying with their child despite asking to do this.

Both EPF coordinators and ECE settings played a strong role in enhancing children’s learning dispositions and skills in preparation for starting school; EPF coordinators through supporting parents with ideas and resources for activities at home. Some ECE services had transition programmes that included special transition groups for older children and taking children on pre-visits to school. Where children attended a number of different schools in the community, pre-visits to a local school with all children helped children understand what happens at school. It helped children to have peers and family attend the same school, and for the teacher to know the family. These processes and relationships helped the child feel comfortable and at home in the school setting. Written assessment information was not generally passed on or discussed with the schools that the case study children attended. There were few reported occasions for ECE and new entrant teachers who were serving a local community to share pedagogical knowledge and knowledge of specific children. Once the child was at school, there were no direct connections between the school and EPF or ECE for the children in our study, although the EPF coordinator kept in contact with the family to varying degrees. These missed opportunities weakened possibilities for collaboration and to work in partnership.

Children experienced transition to school in a range of ways, from very positive to somewhat challenging. When transition worked well for the child, there were culturally compatible cross links from the school with the child’s home language and culture (Royal Tangaere, 1996) and new entrant teachers noticed and picked up on the range of competencies demonstrated within the ECE setting. ECE and school are valuable for supporting coherence in children’s lives and positive transitions.
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1. Introduction

This report is from the fourth and final stage of an evaluation of the Ministry of Education’s (MOE) ECE Participation Programme. The purpose of the evaluation is both summative in gauging the effectiveness of the Participation Programme approach and outcomes, and formative in guiding development. A team from the Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, University of Waikato, was selected to work with the Ministry of Education to undertake Stage 1 of the evaluation in 2011 and 2012, Stage 2 in 2012 and 2013, Stage 3 in 2013 and 2014, and this final stage in 2014 and 2015. An Evaluation Working Group of Ministry of Education staff and University of Waikato researchers is leading the evaluation. It is responsible for the high-level evaluation objectives and evaluation plans, with further roles and responsibilities being assigned during the evaluation.

The Participation Programme comprises a package of six initiatives to increase participation in ECE in selected communities with the greatest numbers of children starting school without having attended ECE. One of these, Engaging Priority Families/whānau (EPF) initiative is an intensive support programme for 3- and 4-year-olds and their families/whānau, aimed at leading to enrolment and regular participation in ECE, support for learning at home and a successful transition to school. It focuses on families who have a 3- or 4-year-old who is not enrolled in early childhood education, identify as Māori or Pasifika, or are from low socioeconomic homes. This definition is similar in its emphasis on socioeconomic and cultural factors to the Eurydice network’s definition of “at risk” that used the OECD category C/disadvantages for “pupils with special educational needs” as “disadvantages stemming mainly from socioeconomic, cultural and language factors” (Eurydice network, 2009, p. 7). The New Zealand definition has a further criterion that children are not attending ECE.

The focus in this final stage of the evaluation is on families enrolled in the EPF initiative, as this initiative offers support from the EPF coordinator in addition to attendance at ECE, and also works with families who are least likely to have participated in ECE without the Participation Programme. Our Stage 3 evaluation report (Mitchell, Meagher-Lundberg, Davison, Kara, & Kalavite, in press) found that EPF coordinators addressed barriers to ECE participation in a variety of ways, but underpinning all approaches was the notion of brokering. That is on-going negotiation and discussion, translating the knowledge held by one party (the EPF co-ordinator) to another (the family) in order to address issues hindering families from taking part in ECE services and with other family support services if they wished. Examples were given from parent viewpoints of how the brokering worked in practice: EPF providers discussed with families what they wanted in relation to ECE especially in relation to cost, location, transport and philosophy; discussed possible services and why these might suit the family; gave information to parents in forms that were understandable; explained why ECE may be valuable for children’s learning and development; and took families to visit ECE services to see if they felt comfortable there.

The Ministry of Education described the main aims for Stage Four of the evaluation as “to focus entirely on learning outcomes for children, and specifically to get priority children’s stories of engaging in the Participation Programme, the outcomes of ECE participation for them and their families, and information about their transitions to school.” This study was seen as a unique opportunity to gain more information in this area.

Background

Strong learning foundations and continuity of learning from birth to age 8 years is a current focus in government policy and is one of the work streams of the Ministerial Cross Sector Cross Forum on Raising Student Achievement. This work stream, Continuity of Early Learning, was established “to consider ways to ensure that every child is a competent and confident learner by age 8 years, participating in a wide range of experiences
across the curriculum frameworks”. *Ka Hikitia – Accelerating Success 2013–2017* (Ministry of Education, 2013a) identifies supporting Māori students during times of transition as a critical success factor. The Pasifika Education Plan (Ministry of Education, 2013b) has as a more specific action step to “effectively transition and support Pasifika learners into English medium schooling using language acquisition strategies, such as strengthening learners’ first languages, as a foundation for learning English. The *New Zealand Curriculum (NZC)* provides a diagram (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 42) setting out the alignment between the strands of the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) and the *Key Competencies* of the NZC.

A Ministry of Education commissioned literature review on transition from early childhood to school (Peters, 2010) has been important in identifying strategies for a successful transition; these relate to working with the child, sharing information, and working with families. This review found:

> For Māori children and Pasifika children, positive, responsive relationships between children, teachers and families, and culturally responsive teaching and assessment are strong themes in ensuring success. (p. 2)

Relationships with home were examined in this study in terms of the connections and information flow between teachers and parents.

Vanessa Paki, a co-investigator on a just completed project, *Learning journeys from early childhood into school*, spoke in interview about the project (Boyd, 2014) and the importance of understanding and familiarity with the language, culture and identity of Māori, of connections with Māori communities, and that Māori children were supported by having family members who were already at school. Likewise *Ka Hikitia – Accelerating Success 2013-2017* identifies the importance for Māori children of strong relationships with teachers/educators and peers and the *Pasifika Education Plan* emphasises engaging parents, families and communities with ECE. A range of factors may conspire against successful transitions for children from low socioeconomic households. Peters (2010) suggests low teacher expectations, lack of recognition or connection with the funds of knowledge these children bring, and problems with home school relationships may contribute.

**Report outline**

Chapter Two discusses the methodology used in the study, including the theoretical framing, research questions, the sample of 18 case study children and families, methods of data collection, ethical issues and limitations to the study.

In Chapter three, we examine findings about children’s learning foundations. We describe categorisation of children into three groups in terms of their learning foundations mapped against strands of *Te Whāriki*: strong learning foundations, very positive learning foundations and a way to go across some strands, and slightly positive learning foundations and a way to go across all strands. We analyse the factors contributing to different learning foundations, particularly participation indicators, ECE service type, role of teachers/educators and EPF coordinators, and home.

Chapter Four examines children’s transition to school. We describe categorisation of children into four groups: a positive transition group, a group who experienced some issues in their transition, and a third group whose transition was challenging for the child. We did not follow a fourth group of five children for a variety of reasons (family circumstances, child illness and child remained in ECE after age 5). We analyse the factors contributing to a positive transition.

In Chapter Five, Conclusion, key findings are analysed in relation to contributions of EPF coordinators, ECE services and schools, and implications for policy and practice are discussed.
2. Methodology
A longitudinal study over six months was undertaken to examine the early learning experiences of EPF children and their transition to school. The main focus was on how ECE and EPF had contributed to strengthening children’s learning foundations and supporting transition to school. Perspectives and documented information about the child’s learning and development were gathered from each child’s whānau, EPF coordinator, ECE head teacher/supervisor and primary school new entrant teacher. These were analysed in relation to the ECE Curriculum Framework, Te Whāriki. Observations in the child’s early childhood setting gathered data about short learning episodes. These were used in an interview with the new entrant teacher as examples of what we saw happening, to ask whether these were happening in school. The child’s transition to school experiences was mapped against the Key Competencies in the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC).

Children’s learning is best supported when teachers/educators and parents work together with educational aims in mind. In order to help explain the contribution of EPF and ECE to a child’s learning foundations we considered whether and how EPF and ECE contributed to the home learning environment. The study examined whānau experiences of participating in EPF, ECE and the early months of school, and how these contributed to involvement with the child’s learning at ECE and school, and at home.

Theoretical framing
Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model of human development offers a theoretical rationale for those most involved in children’s lives working in partnership. Children’s most direct day-to-day reality is within their immediate settings of home, early childhood education service or school, and neighbourhood. Children’s interactions with significant others and their experiences within these settings influence their wellbeing, learning, and development. Children’s experiences are also influenced by surrounding ecological systems, such as family workplaces, social networks and community, and the macrosystem of institutional patterns of culture, such as the economy, customs and bodies of knowledge. The chronosystem, the passage of time, encompasses change or consistency over time in the characteristics of the person and the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1984). The linkages and processes taking place between these systems influence the child’s learning environment. Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested that the developmental potential of a child’s participation in two or more settings is enhanced when there is consensus about goals, and supportive linkages between the settings. In his opening address to the Hui Taumata Matauranga, Mason Durie (2001) highlighted the importance for Māori students of integrated action:

The principle of integrated action recognises the multiple players in education. Success or failure is the result of many forces acting together—school and community; teachers and parents; students and their parents. Lives in New Zealand are too closely intertwined to pretend that action in one sphere does not have actions in another. Unless there is some platform for integrated action, then development will be piecemeal and progress will be uneven. (p. 7)

Providing culturally compatible cross-links, including speaking te reo Māori and upholding tikanga Māori, between the child’s microsystems of home and educational setting is regarded as a way to optimise the language and social development of children in kōhanga reo (Royal Tangaere, 1997). Similar arguments apply for Pasifika children and children from diverse cultural groups.
The theoretical framing for the study also drew on the concepts of ‘funds of knowledge’ and ‘cultural capital’ as a way to characterise families in terms of the cultural resources and strengths that they possess. The underlying premise of a ‘funds of knowledge’ approach to theorising families, communities and early childhood settings is that “people are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge” (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, ppix-x). Bourdieu refers to cultural capital as forms of knowledge, and skills and ways of being and behaving that confer status and privilege in society (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 48). Cultural capital draws on previous generations’ funds of knowledge and understandings of the world that include language, activities, significant customs and cultural nuances, practices and expectations (Sullivan, 2001). This knowledge is both indirectly and directly passed down to successive generations through interactions within children’s home life and their community. Analysis of relationships with parents and whānau and reflection of home and community experiences and values in assessment documentation was how we used these concepts of funds of knowledge and cultural capital within this study.

Research questions

In the following research questions, we took a broad view of the meaning of ‘participation’. For the child, participation included attendance at ECE and also aspects of engagement such as communication, interacting with others, collaboration and persisting in the face of difficulties. Participation in this broader sense within the activities and interactions at home and in ECE and school settings enables dispositions/competencies and skills/knowledge oriented goals to become integrated (cf, Gordon Commission on the Future of Assessment in Early Education, 2013; Gresalfi, 2009 discussed in the Continuity of early learning literature scan, Carr, Davis & Cowie, 2015). For priority families/whānau, participation included engagement in their child’s learning, in the ECE setting and school, take-up of participation opportunities for themselves, and advocacy for their child.

1. **Participation:** what did the child’s participation in EPF and ECE look like?
   
   i. How did the whānau’s approach to participation support the child’s participation?
   
   ii. In what ways did the whānau’s approach to participation change as a result of being in EPF?

2. **Learning Outcomes:** what learning foundations did the child develop during the time they participated in EPF and ECE?
   
   i. What support (from ECE and EPF) helped the child develop strong learning foundations?
   
   ii. If learning foundations are not strong, what additional support (from ECE and EPF) might have helped the child develop stronger learning foundations? NB support to child from whānau included in EPF and ECE support, and could be discussed as a strand of this where relevant.

3. **Transition:** How did the child experience transition to school?
   
   i. In what ways did the EPF and ECE settings support the child’s early months at school?
   
   ii. How did ECE support of the child contribute to ease (or not) of transition to school?
   
   iii. How did EPF support of the child and whānau and brokerage role support the ease (or not) of transition to school? NB support might be specific transition preparation or regular ECE/EPF activities.
   
   iv. How did how did the school and new entrant teacher contribute to the ease (or not) of transition to school?
   
   v. How did the learning foundations developed in the EPF and ECE settings by the child and whānau support the child’s early months at school?
Case studies

A case study approach was undertaken to enable analysis of the participation over time of priority families/whānau and their children in EPF, ECE and the early weeks of school, and the affordances for participation offered by EPF and ECE. Case study data was gathered in two phases 1) September to December 2014, and 2) February to May 2015.

Sample

EPF providers who had taken part in the evaluation over the last three years and with whom the researchers had developed good relationships were invited to participate and help us recruit families. After initial contact by the EPF coordinator, the researchers contacted families directly and invited them to take part.

Eighteen EPF children (aged 4 years 5 months or older by 1 August 2014) and their whānau participating in EPF initiatives from four providers were recruited to form the case study sample.

Table 1: Case study children by ethnicity and type of ECE. and participation indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Type of ECE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caleb</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>Education and care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Māori/Samoan</td>
<td>Education and care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaki</td>
<td>Niuean/Samoan</td>
<td>Education and care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xavier</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>Education and care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemi</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>Te Kura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Tongan</td>
<td>Education and care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roimata</td>
<td>Cook Islands Māori</td>
<td>Playgroup then Pasifika homebased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alisi</td>
<td>Tongan</td>
<td>Education and care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sefa</td>
<td>Tongan</td>
<td>Homebased then Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangi</td>
<td>Cook Islands Māori</td>
<td>Education and care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blake</td>
<td>Cook Islands Māori</td>
<td>Education and Care (Pasifika)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>Māori/Pākehā</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>Māori/Pākehā</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masina</td>
<td>Niuean/Samoan</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anahera</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>Homebased then Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salesi</td>
<td>Samoan</td>
<td>Kindergarten then Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Samoan</td>
<td>Homebased then Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aiden</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>Education and care</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Instruments

We gathered data from a range of sources in order to triangulate information.

In ECE and with EPF

- EPF coordinator interview about support for the family, the child’s learning outcomes and transition to school.

- Attendance at ECE (hours, days, regularity), information from ECE centre with consent from family.

- ECE teacher/educator interview about the child, particularly the child’s learning foundations and transition to school.

- Analysis of child’s portfolio in terms of breadth of learning across the strands of Te Whāriki.

- Written observations of short learning episodes.

At school

- New entrant teacher interview about the child’s transition, opportunities within the child’s classroom and the school for participation, and the child’s take-up of these opportunities. Observational data gathered from ECE setting was described and the new entrant teacher asked whether that was happening in school, and how the teacher was finding this.

At home

- Family/whānau interview at start of project and again when child had gone to school on views of child’s learning and development, child participation, communication, social interactions, behaviour. How parents see EPF and ECE as having contributed to this, and how parents see their participation in ECE and the child’s early learning as having contributed to this.

- Before school focus: child’s participation and development of learning foundations through ECE, EPF and parents/whānau. Parents’ sense of child’s readiness to transition to school, and what had been done to prepare and support the child’s transition.

- Post transition focus: what the child’s transition was like for the child and whānau. What helped (from ECE, EPF, whānau participation, new entrant teacher) and whether there was anything that would have helped the transition to go more smoothly for the child.

Data from EPF provider

- Interview before child transitions to school: Communication with parent including views and use of Early Learning Plan, brokering of support for family, communication with ECE service child attends, transition support process and view of how transition went, and how the EPF provider sees child’s learning foundations.

Portfolio analysis is contained in Appendix 1. Other research instruments are available from the University of Waikato on request.
Analysis

This is largely a qualitative study, with a small sample. This qualitative approach allowed us to gain insights into the strength of the children’s learning foundations and connections with EPF brokering, indicators of participation in ECE (duration, length of ECE experience, age of enrolment), teacher/educator and EPF coordinator input, and parent/whānau engagement in ECE and their child’s learning. Secondly, we gained insights into the degree to which the child’s experience of starting school was positive, and connections with early learning foundations, continuity with home learning environment and ECE (including parental expectations), readiness, and processes to support transition.

First, we grouped children in terms of the strength of development in their early learning foundations across five domains that are likely to provide a platform for school and lifelong learning, mapped against the strands of Te Whāriki. These were:

- **Wellbeing:** Confidence; determining own actions, making own choices; knowledge skills and attitudes to keep selves safe and healthy, teacher and parent rating that child is “ready” for school;
- **Contribution:** Working, playing collaboratively with others (socialisation and caring); strategies for relating to others; respect for others; taking responsibility;
- **Belonging:** Engagement; persistence with difficulty;
- **Exploration:** Developing working theories; Enthusiasm for exploring the environment actively; and
- **Communication (non-verbal and verbal communication becoming more complex; familiarity and enjoyment with reading, writing and mathematics; familiarity and enjoyment in being creative and expressive).**

These foundations were gauged from parent interview data, ECE teacher interview data, a short observation of the child at ECE, and portfolio analysis. We rated each child on the dimensions since attending ECE by working in pairs and considering each dimension in turn against evidence triangulated from the four sources. One group of children was rated as having strong learning foundations; one group as having very positive learning foundations and still had a way to go across some dimensions; and one group as having slightly positive learning foundations, and had a way to go across all the dimensions.

Second, we grouped the children in terms of the degree to which their transition to school was experienced as positive. We developed indicators derived from interview data which we mapped against the Key Competencies of the New Zealand Curriculum. The Key Competencies and indicators were:

- **Managing self:** child is settled and happy within a week; child manages own needs; child adjusts to routines;
- **Relating to others:** Co-operative interactions with others; cares for others;
- **Participating and contributing:** Child is confident to express a view; contribute; engaged; perseveres with difficulty;
- **Thinking:** Problem solving; working theories; and
- **Using language symbols and texts:** Familiarity and enjoyment reading, writing and mathematics.
We were not able to follow up a third group of four children. These children are considered separately with analysis of contextual factors.

We have used the material collected to provide an overview of the range of development of early learning foundations and transition experiences, and the factors and processes that appear to contribute to them. For each outcome, we examined the contrasting groups of children, comparing them in relation to potential contributing factors that were likely to constitute an influence and in relation to contextual factors (such as ECE service type, transience, family disruptions, health).

**Ethical issues**

The University of Waikato, Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee gave ethical approval for this study. We had already made connections with EPF providers during other phases of the evaluation and had developed good working relationships with them. In telephone conversations, they said they were happy to continue to be involved. We then gave providers written information and a letter inviting their participation, followed by a further telephone call. These providers made initial contact for families with whom they were working, to explain the study and find out whether the family was interested in participating. They discussed the written information and left families with our letter inviting participation. If the family was interested in taking part, the researcher then spoke with the family and obtained written informed consent for an interview and to gather data about their child from the ECE setting and school. In some instances, where families wanted this, the provider arranged the interview. Telesia Kalavite, a Tongan academic and researcher employed at the University of Waikato reviewed the analysis and reporting from a cultural lens. She has been a researcher for other stages of the project. A Māori researcher, Helena Kara, undertook some field research with Māori families; she had also taken part in previous stages.

**Limitations**

The short time frame for this project, with data collection happening over six months at the end of one year in the ECE service and the beginning of the next in schools meant that the study was only a snapshot of two time periods. Peters (2010), highlights that transition is not an event but a process and that initial skills and adjustments are only a part of the picture. A longer-term study would have offered a more balanced picture. As well, we did not find out about children’s own views of their transition experiences although we interviewed their parents. Views of transition vary depending on the participant, and children’s views would have offered their own perspective. We did not rate the quality of the ECE setting where the child was enrolled. Such information would have contributed to a greater understanding of the nature of the settings and quality factors contributing to children’s learning and development and their transition experiences. Finally, a larger sample would be necessary to conclude that the associations we found in this study would hold across the board, but the associations we have found are consistent with other research on learning foundations and transition to school.
3. Participation and Learning foundations

Participation

Sixteen of the case study children had not attended ECE before they were recruited into the EPF initiative. One child had attended in Australia for two months; another had attended while his mother did a course but had not been able to find a suitable centre after the course finished. Children’s starting age in ECE varied from age 2 years to 4 years 8 months; most were recruited into ECE at an older age, over 4 years. Note that the EPF programme is for children aged from 3 years; the one child starting at age 2 years did not meet the criteria. Months of attendance ranged from 3 months to 3 years. Five of 18 children had attended for less than 6 months. Twelve children attended for 30 hours per week; five attended for 20 hours per week; and one was enrolled in Te Kura. ECE teachers and parents were asked how regular the child’s attendance was. All children had very regular attendance (10 were brought to ECE by van) or largely regular attendance, i.e. they missed attending only on occasion usually with reason, such as illness or family visiting.

Table 2: Case study children by type of ECE and participation indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Type of ECE</th>
<th>Duration of attendance in ECE in months</th>
<th>Hours per week</th>
<th>Regularity of attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caleb</td>
<td>Education and care</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Largely regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Education and care</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaki</td>
<td>Education and care</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xavier</td>
<td>Education and care</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemi</td>
<td>Te Kura</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Education and care</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roimata</td>
<td>Playgroup then Pasifika homebased</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alisi</td>
<td>Education and care</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sefa</td>
<td>Homebased then Kindergarten</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangi</td>
<td>Education and care</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blake</td>
<td>Education and Care (Pasifika)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Largely Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Largely Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masina</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anahera</td>
<td>Homebased then Kindergarten</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salesi</td>
<td>Kindergarten then Kindergarten</td>
<td>2 then 5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Homebased then Kindergarten</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aiden</td>
<td>Education and care</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participation in ECE was facilitated by the EPF coordinator and it is clear that without her support, most children would not have enrolled. Several families were referred to EPF by external agencies, including Plunket, Family Start and CYF. This finding reinforces the importance of EPF coordinators having connections with a range of
family services in the community. The processes EPF used to encourage ECE enrolment were the same as reported in other stages of the evaluation (Mitchell et al., 2014), i.e., discussion of value of ECE, finding out about family aspirations and needs, making suggestions about appropriate ECE services, taking parents on visits to ECE so the parent could choose. The engagement with EPF and the decision to enrol their child in ECE changed the course of life for some families by supporting the parent practically in parenting and the child’s educational opportunities.

For myself I felt very welcomed from her and um she just explained everything to me and I said “Oh yeah, that’s us, can we do it now”. I was ready on what she was telling me and here I am today. Her support and her support of doing that, I don’t think the kids would be anywhere at this point.

If anything we needed like clothes or shoes for school, she’s been really good in helping us and also providing for us. And also basically [Aaron] inherited my [health] problems and she’s been quite involved with [...] making sure the kindergarten is aware of what to do, when to contact me and when to call an ambulance or whatever. She’s been really great in that aspect. Keeping on top of everything.

Two families had had CYFS involvement and one of these, according to the coordinator, might have had the children taken into CYFS care without the EPF support. Two families became actively involved in their ECE programme. Hemi’s mum worked with her son using resources supplied by Te Kura; she had done the same with her older children, and had the support of the EPF coordinator for this work. Roimata’s mum was actively involved in the playgroup and in Roimata’s learning at home. She took responsibility for organising Roimata’s enrolment at school and school visits.

Ten families used the services of a van to transport their child to ECE. From these families’ viewpoints, the van was an asset that enabled the child to attend ECE regularly, and in some cases seemed to have made the difference between attending and not attending. Some EPF coordinators spoke of parental involvement in ECE starting with simply being up in the morning and preparing the child to go to ECE (either for the van pick-up or to be regular about going).

[EPF role] at the time, it was just to maintain that he engages at every scheduled time at the daycare; as well as positive parenting with the family; picking up and dropping off. I did that right through until they got a car. She could’ve walked and she did on sunny days, but it started off where I would pick them up and take them to daycare, Mum and baby. She’s got little youngsters as well (EPF coordinator).

It seems that one key change for all families was that involvement in EPF encouraged them to ensure their child regularly attended ECE. This was also reported to be a common goal in Early Learning Plans. Some parents using the van service had little contact with the ECE service; others, whose children went on the van, were expected to visit the centre once a month. Other changes from participation in EPF and ECE were in home learning activities, reported below.
**Patterns of strength in learning foundations**

Analysis of data showed all children in the study developed stronger learning foundations during the time their family worked with the EPF co-ordinator and their child attended ECE, but these happened to different degrees and for different reasons. We divided the children into three groups according to their learning foundations:

- A group of five children categorised as having ‘strong learning foundations’ across strands of Te Whāriki.
- A group of nine children who had evidence of very positive learning foundations and had a way to go in terms of learning foundations across some strands of Te Whāriki.
- A group of four children who had evidence of slightly positive learning foundations and had a way to go across all the strands of Te Whāriki.

Table 3 shows patterns of strength in learning foundations. Analysis of the range shows that the ‘strong learning foundations’ group had strengths across all strands of Te Whāriki except that indicators of exploration were not highlighted strongly or not evidenced in documentation, interviews or observations for two of the children. The second group of children, showing a very positive learning foundation in relation to at least one strand, was particularly strong on indicators of the communication strand of Te Whāriki, followed by contribution, then wellbeing/belonging. For the third group, strength on the contribution strand was the highest, but strength on other indicators was minimal.

**Table 3: Learning foundations patterns of strength (individual children)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confidence  Determining own actions</th>
<th>Socialisation  and caring  Respect Taking responsibility  Contribution</th>
<th>Persistence  Engagement and focus  Belonging</th>
<th>Working theories  Enthusiasm for exploring environment  Exploration</th>
<th>Familiarity and enjoyment  reading, writing  mathematics  Creative and expressive  Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confidence  Determining own actions</td>
<td>Socialisation  and caring  Respect Taking responsibility  Contribution</td>
<td>Persistence  Engagement and focus  Belonging</td>
<td>Working theories  Enthusiasm for exploring environment  Exploration</td>
<td>Familiarity and enjoyment  reading, writing  mathematics  Creative and expressive  Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xavier</td>
<td>Strong learning foundations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roimata</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaki</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salesi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anahera</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>Very positive learning foundations and a way to go across some strands</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masina</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sefa</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alisi</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caleb</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aiden</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blake</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rangi</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The dark shaded areas show where aspects are particularly strong, lighter shades where moderately strong and unshaded areas where no information or less strong.
Figure 1 shows patterns of strength for all the children in the study. The finding that indicators of exploration were least evidenced in documentation, interviews and observations for all children is consistent with some other New Zealand research. The Continuity of Early Learning study (Mitchell et al., 2015) found an apparent relative neglect of children’s working theories as a lens for assessment. An ERO national evaluation report on infants and toddlers in ECE services (Education Review Office, 2015) found that in almost half the services “although teachers maintained an appropriate focus on children’s wellbeing and belonging, they struggled to encompass the communication and exploration strands of Te Whāriki in their curriculum” (p. 24). Note however that communication in our study was emphasised.

**Figure 1: Learning foundations patterns of strength (all children)**

Communication

Overall, communication was given most prominence in parent, teacher/educator and EPF coordinator interviews and documentation. Thirteen of eighteen children were reported to have developed strongly in indicators of Communication. In particular, familiarity with reading, writing, and mathematics was one emphasis that tallied with the wishes of many parents for their child to learn to write and recognise their name and know basic counting and colours before going to school. For example, one parent, talking of how her daughter “can do lines and stories (scribbles)” said to the EPF coordinator “I would love for her to write her name before she starts school”. Most ECE teachers/educators and some EPF coordinators worked on these basic skills; some in a structured and rote way, and others within the context of meaningful activities. The conscious focus was in response both to parent wishes and to views that these skills would be useful for the child on starting school. Plentiful reading opportunities were said to be priorities but in four of the ECE services, reading opportunities were mainly in group activities, e.g. mat time. Some ECE services regularly took children to the local library, and two parents reported doing this with their own children after encouragement from the ECE teacher or EPF coordinator.

Six children were in ECE centres where their home language (Niuean, Tongan, Cook Island Māori) was used alongside English, and cultural practices and values were enacted. These children largely transitioned into mainstream primary schools closest to their homes. One child, Blake moved overseas with his family; although the ECE had taken him on visits to the local school with which they had a partnership, with a view to familiarising him with school routines.
Cultural support for other Pasifika children in transition to mainstream was happenstance rather than planned. For example Roimata’s teacher knew the family and was herself Tongan speaking but there was no link between the ECE and school, or any visit prior to school start. As the teacher said:

I didn’t have any contact with her before; and I didn’t even know that she was going to come.
(NE teacher)

Similarly Alisi had no school visits. The EPF provider had understood that the ECE was to take her on visits with the local school, but this did not happen and the parent made a last minute decision around which school she was to attend and said:

I enrolled her at the beginning; the first day she went to school; no visits; and they were all right; I fill in the thing and I got all my papers done and she was in straight away.

Te reo Māori was seen as an integral part of the programme and so used regularly in five ECE services and by two parents.

Good oral communication skills were regarded by most teachers/educators, parents and coordinators as important. Two children had been referred by the ECE service to speech therapists and one attended an extension class. These interventions were said to address the issues of concern. However, speech/health related issues for three children, Hannah, Rangi and Jason were not picked up by their ECE teachers/educators or their EPF coordinators. Observations and interviews highlighted that each of these children had a way to go in terms of their learning (see Table 3). It is likely that had had their issues been recognised earlier, remedial action would have been taken, with positive effects on their learning and development.

Hannah’s mother was concerned that Hannah had limited ability to speak in full sentences. The researcher also observed that Hannah did not use verbs in her sentences. The centre supervisor rated Hannah as possibly “not ready” for school, and had suggested “holding her back” to support further development in her learning and socialisation. However, when asked what additional support the centre had provided to that point, the supervisor said

I think it’s just us keeping an eye on her from what we knew of her from [the EPF coordinator] and the mum. We really wanted to take care of her but not to make her feel any different from anyone in anyway; so we just wanted her to blend in so tried not to show any particular attention and she just blended in because of that.

The mother wanted Hannah to start school when she turned five. The EPF coordinator supported the mother in this decision, helping her to work on Hannah’s self-help and early literacy skills.

I sat down with the Mother and said to her “what do you want”. She said “I want her to start school next year”. I said “right that will be our goal. That’s what we’ll work in the future for and work on her self-help skills”. They’re all covered, she’s fine with that, let’s look at her early literacy, knowing the letters of her name, and so she can identify the letters of her name, and go from that, simple basic one.

Hannah’s primary school teacher reported that Hannah came to school unable to write her name or count to 10, as well as needing support in terms of speech and communication, in particular reading social cues. It seems that while the EPF coordinator provided some targeted support, the ECE supervisor was not very analytic about teaching approaches that might have strengthened Hannah’s communication skills.
Rangi, who had attended an education and care centre for over a year, was rated by the ECE supervisor as “not ready” with words and numbers and having poor listening skills. His mother thought he might have a hearing problem and had raised this with her doctor who put Rangi on a five-month waiting list. Rangi’s possible hearing difficulties were noticeable to the researcher too, but when asked about Rangi’s Before School Check, the centre supervisor did not know whether this had been done. Subsequently, when we followed Rangi to school, Rangi’s mother, following discussion with the researcher arranged a hearing and vision check with the school nurse. This had not been discussed with the EPF provider. Rangi was found to have both hearing and vision problems requiring intervention.

The mother of a third child, Jason, was concerned about a speech issue, but said she did not discuss this with the centre. The EPF provider noted Jason was extremely shy and discussed with his mother the importance of experiencing play with other children, sharing, and being confident. Interestingly, while Jason was considered ‘ready for school’ by the ECE teacher, the centre encouraged his mother to enrol him in their six year old programme in order to give him time to develop stronger “emotional intelligence”:

He is independent, he has good social skills, he is willing to sit and listen, he’s not going to be disruptive or be the class clown or distract the other children ... I do think he will be ready for school. ... I just worry about his emotional intelligence, that he is almost a little emotionally immature (ECE teacher).

Similar to Hannah’s ECE teacher, the teacher of Jason did not offer ideas on how the ECE programme could be planned to better support the child’s learning and development. Subsequently, Jason was enrolled in the six-year-old programme. The EPF provider had advised starting school however the mother said that she was not confident that he could manage the walk to school safely and preferred him to travel in the van to ECE at this point. Jason’s mother said Jason was very unhappy continuing at the ECE.

Contribution

Ten of 18 children were reported to have developed strong learning foundations linked to the Contribution strand of Te Whāriki, and a further three had very positive foundations. The indicators for this strand—Working/playing collaboratively with others (socialisation and caring); strategies for relating to others; respect for others; taking responsibility—could be fostered in group settings where children interacted with other children and adults. Xavier’s mum said that:

One thing he’s learnt from preschool is sharing with other kids and interacting with the other kids. When Xavier wasn’t in [preschool] a lot of his cousins wouldn’t interact with him; he was a very lonely child. They found it hard to interact with him because he was selfish and didn’t want to share and was a bully.…. Now that he’s in daycare they’ve taught him how to share and how to interact with other kids in a good manner … Now he’s getting on better with cousins; he’s been asked for a sleepover, that’s a big difference with me, his attitude.

Xavier’s experience contrasts with that of Hemi who participated in Te Kura because his mother did not trust others to care for her child in an ECE setting. His mother described Hemi as having behavioural issues; not sharing, getting angry and frustrated and not listening. In the school setting he got angry and fought with other children. The EPF coordinator had expressed concerns to mum around his behaviour and how this may impact on his schooling.

That was my concern with him interacting with other people; I thought because he’s just with mum and at home and not really interacting with a lot of outside people that he might find school a bit of a struggle because he doesn’t know how to communicate to them.
The nature of Te Kura, a correspondence course meant that any face-to-face interaction was not possible to support addressing these issues. The EPF coordinator played a brokering role between the parent and Te Kura teacher, letting the teacher know what the mum was doing with Hemi, providing support and making contact with the parent when the teacher lost contact. The EPF coordinator encouraged visits to the library and music programmes to expand Hemi’s engagement with others.

Wellbeing

Wellbeing was strongly encouraged by most EPF coordinators and ECE services. All but two children were reported to have made big gains in confidence and in self-help skills, including being able to dress themselves, to manage their toileting, to use sunscreen and a hat outside, and to follow routines. One child, Aaron, who came to a kindergarten at age 4½ and was still using nappies during the day, was supported to become toilet trained. Achievements were purposely reinforced in documentation: a learning story in Aaron’s portfolio reinforced Aaron’s achievements in dressing himself and using the toilet. New entrant teachers regarded self-care as important. This is discussed further in the Transition to School chapter. Another example of intentional teacher support for wellbeing was for Xavier who had a fire at home, damaging most of the family possessions. The whole community assisted the family and teachers also organised a visit from the fire truck to the ECE centre as part of the process to alleviate Xavier’s anxiety. Wellbeing is supported when children are able to make their own choices and determine their own actions. Roimata recognised her self-determination when, on dressing herself, she told her mum “I’m the boss of myself”. Most ECE centres organised health checks, but as noted above, three services had not identified the need for specialist support for three case study children. The New Zealand Curriculum aligns the strand Wellbeing with the Key Competency ‘Managing self’ which it describes as being “associated with self-motivation, a ‘can-do’ attitude, and with students seeing themselves as capable learners” (p. 12).

Belonging

Belonging was manifest where children were engaged, focused and persisting when things were difficult. All five children with strong learning foundations and seven of the nine who had very positive learning foundations displayed these dispositions, being described in various ways e.g., “willing to give it a go” (Xavier), “comfortable to join in” (Anahera), “sees things through” (Alisi), “starting to persist” (Aaron), “comfortable to try out new things” (Caleb), “shows focused concentration” (Salesi) and “concentrates if a challenge” (Sefa). A learning story described a school visit where Caleb greeted the ladies in the office in te reo and English. He put his hand up to answer the teacher’s questions, concentrated and did what the teacher asked. This compared with two children in the slightly positive learning foundations group, described by teachers as “not focused for long” (Rangi) and “not big on participating” (Jason).

Exploration

Indicators of exploration (developing working theories; enthusiasm for exploring the local environment and/or the world actively) were less common in documentation, interview comments or observations. Evidence was apparent for only three children. One example in Caleb’s portfolio described how on a visit to the library, Caleb helped carry the books to be returned and posted them in the return slot. He looked through the library shelves to choose a book, on sport, which he showed his friends and told them about the sport. Another example, Xavier was observed asking a girl and boy to look at the drain, saying “Smell it, smellies pee, when we pee in the toilet the pee goes way up and over the playground and everywhere”. He is explaining to them what the drain is for. The group of children all look down the drain. Nevertheless, in this observation the teacher did not seem to recognise these ideas as evidence of thinking moved the discussion to a different topic with unrelated comments and suggestions.
Factors contributing to strong learning foundations

We examined differences between the groups to ascertain any factors that seemed to contribute to stronger learning foundations. We considered participation indicators, service type, teaching and assessment practices and connections with home.

Participation indicators

We analysed the child’s starting age in ECE, months of attendance in ECE, hours attended per week and regularity of attendance. The only participation indicator associated with stronger learning foundations was months of attendance in ECE. All five children in the “strong learning foundations” group had attended ECE for more than six months. Three children with less than 6 months enrolment in ECE were in the “very positive learning foundations” group, perhaps indicating that a longer period of time in ECE might have contributed even more. Two children with less than six months attendance were in the slightly positive learning foundations group.

Making opportunities for social interaction

Hemi, enrolled in Te Kura, did not have many opportunities to interact with other children and adults. His situation, discussed under “Contribution” above, shows that despite efforts made by the EPF coordinator to encourage Hemi to have opportunity to interact with other adults and children, this did not eventuate to any large extent, and Hemi was reported to have behavioural issues and not to get on with others when he started school. It is a conjecture as to whether such opportunity would have supported Hemi in his social interactions.

Conscious decisions were made by the EPF coordinator with the parents for three children to move from a home-based to an ECE centre before school (or attend both) so that they would become used to a larger group of children. Reportedly, the changes did support social development and ‘readiness’ for school in terms of these children becoming used to being in a group setting and getting accustomed to routines.

Intentional teaching

A main contributing factor associated with children’s learning foundations seemed to be the intentional focus of teachers/educators on reinforcing and strengthening valued dispositions and learning in their teaching and learning approaches and through assessment documentation. There was variability in the quality of the content of portfolios, not connected to the length of time a child attended; for example Caleb’s portfolio (he started ECE shortly before turning five) evidenced strong links to the community with many examples of parent contribution as well as providing assessment of Caleb’s dispositions across all curriculum areas. Contrasting this was Jason’s portfolio which after six months had just one entry, and that of Alisi who had been attending nearly two years but contained largely evidence of Alisi engaged in group activities. This intentional focus was evident in the decision made with parents above for three children in home-based ECE to attend a centre. Some learning stories in the ECE portfolio showed a distinct strategy to work on an area of learning such as Aaron’s toilet training story above. Salesi’s teacher wrote a learning story about Salesi researching the three musketeers. Aaron’s portfolio included a copy of a newspaper clipping of his big brother with a well known New Zealander; a connecting link to home and the wider community that supports a sense of belonging. Hannah’s learning story comments on learning to call children by their names and making friends.

Home environment

Another contributing factor seemed to be the attention paid to children’s learning in the home environment. The development of learning activities at home was often closely linked both to what was happening at ECE and activities suggested by the EPF coordinator. The home activities were commonly around reading, writing and counting. For some children there was a clear link between the learning activities described in the home setting, the learning gained from ECE and the input of the EPF coordinator.
Table 4 shows comments by five parents of children in the strong learning foundations group. Three parents described the EPF coordinator playing a role in setting goals with families, suggesting activities and providing resources on a regular basis; especially reading to the children, counting and writing letters/the child’s name. The other two parents talked about the role of the coordinator in getting the child into ECE and explaining benefits. The role of the ECE service in supporting learning was made apparent to parents through the activities done there, the paintings and stories the child brought home and changes noticed by the parent in what the child could do, especially growing confidence and communication skills. For Xavier, the EPF coordinator was a go-between to the kindergarten, bringing news of activities there to the parent. Home activities were sometimes suggested by the EPF coordinator or copied from what was seen in the ECE service.

Table 4: Contribution of ECE and EPF to supporting home learning activities for children in “strong foundations” group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Home learning activities</th>
<th>How ECE service helped</th>
<th>How EPF coordinator helped</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xavier</td>
<td>Mum does speech and writing activities (ABCs and numbers) provided by EPF coordinator and through communication with the ECE service where the coordinator acts as go-between or takes the mother.</td>
<td>The EPF coordinator has her visits at Community Kindy to observe what he is doing at school, his learning and his improvements and she’s come back to me and tell me and we’ll go through it; this is what she saw and learnt from Xavier being at daycare (Xavier’s mum).</td>
<td>She helped me put Xavier into daycare and then we had a few goals that we wrote down for Xavier – our aim for his improvement. Pronouncing his letters and words properly, sounding the letters out; and his numbers (Xavier’s mum).</td>
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<td>Roimata</td>
<td>Mum does a lot of reading with Roimata and uses puzzles and does activities seen at playgroup.</td>
<td>Like … some activities they are doing every day. Like when they are doing the ABCs, numbers, puzzles, they do some painting. Roimata loves painting. She can draw her own pictures and you don’t know that she can do that, and she explain her story about the pictures. She can sit down and colour and paint. She write her name, she copies from the thing (Roimata’s mum).</td>
<td>She helped a lot, like bring some stuff for Roimata to learn. Puzzles also the books cos Roimata really love to read even though she don’t know how to read. Every time she spend her time she looks at the books and read. She loves doing that every day. She tells her own story about the pictures (Roimata’s mum).</td>
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<td>Malaki</td>
<td>Mum sets goals with coordinator and follows activities suggested by coordinator around language, writing his name and reading.</td>
<td>When he first started he used to bring home his pictures and tell me about it … He’d come home and “that’s what we did Mum”. He did a butterfly and I was laughing to myself cos he had a leaf and I said “what’s this dot?” He said “it’s not a dot it’s an egg Mum”. So all the things he’s brought home I’ve hanged up in our room. And they sing.</td>
<td>Yes we have these goals and we do them … Like in the beginning it was ‘make little sentences’. Now he can do sentences…. Then the next one, I was surprised because he did his name … In the beginning I was like ‘what’s that’, like scribble. But he’s getting better. Just practising his writing and reading. She [coordinator] gives me some books for him to read … He makes up his own stories and I say “that’s not right”, and he says “Yes it is Mum, it’s my story”. I say “ok” … I think one time we were out and he said “Mum that’s just like the book we read eh”. He saw trucks and remembered from the book. Just little things if we are reading the books then things will pop up [linking books to daily life] (Malaki’s mum).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Salesi</td>
<td>Siblings and Salesi have competitions at home over knowledge of counting and letters.</td>
<td>I ask how did you know that word? He says “from school”. Learning from being in the kindergarten. [What else is he learning?] He is learning how to spell his name and letters. He knows his colours. And he didn’t really know the alphabet but now he shows off about it.</td>
<td>Cos she come and talk to me about learning and I can have time and space. The kids would learn more. She did encourage me so I wouldn’t have to worry about the kids. They enjoy themselves as well (Salesi’s mum).</td>
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There was variability in the learning activities said to be carried out in the home setting, in the input of the EPF coordinator to home learning, and in the information about learning gained from the ECE setting for the 13 families where children had less strong learning foundations. Some EPF coordinators played a key role in formulating goals with the family and suggesting activities focused on learning. Parents found out about their children’s learning in the ECE setting by observing activities, having information conveyed by the ECE teacher through documentation and talking, or through the EPF coordinator telling the parent about the child’s day. The role of the EPF coordinator as a conduit for information was particularly evident for families whose children were transported to the ECE setting.

Tables 5 and 6, outline comments by the thirteen parents of children with less strong learning foundations. The input of the EPF coordinator was essential to the development of the learning of three children who showed very positive learning foundations and two children showing slightly positive learning foundations. The coordinator working with Sefa’s family was instrumental in both expanding the learning activities provided by his grandmother for the home-based service, and in convincing the grandmother that a teacher-led service (kindergarten) would be of benefit to his learning before he went to school. Hemi’s EPF coordinator worked with the parent and the teacher of Te Kura; providing resources, explanations and additional activities to expand on the programme. However, the opportunity for Hemi to develop good communication skills was limited to his immediate home environment. The limited time frame for the coordinator working with Caleb and the challenges in working around the high needs of the family meant that the focus was on engaging the family in ECE, with the coordinator supporting learning activities when visiting the ECE setting.

Similarly, the timeframe for the EPF coordinator to work with both Hannah and Jason was short, around five months. In this time the coordinators supported the family in the child’s participation in ECE, discussed issues they were facing which were barriers to engagement and provided resources for activities at home. Both families had been reluctant to go to an ECE service; Hannah’s mother was embarrassed about a particular behaviour of Hannah’s and Jason’s mother had a bad experience in a previous ECE and was dealing with other family issues. Aaron’s father was very much supported by the EPF coordinator in practical ways and ensuring Aaron attended ECE in the van. The coordinator acted as a go-between to the kindergarten, and if children were absent she (or the ‘hub’ which passed messages on) was the point of contact for the family rather than the ECE setting (this was a management policy). The coordinator regarded this practice as simplifying channels of communication for the father and supporting the family’s needs; the ECE teacher would have liked a more direct relationship with the father herself. The ECE teacher was also somewhat critical that the regular use of a van prevented face-to-face contact and that Aaron was brought by van on occasions when he was quite sick. She regarded this practice as not putting the child’s needs and rights to the forefront.

The role played by the EPF coordinators for families of three children, Alisi, Rangi, and Mark, was limited to visiting the ECE, providing feedback about the child’s learning at ECE to the parent and checking to see that the children were going to the ECE. Visits to the families were informal with conversations focusing largely on
behaviour. For Rangi a more focused approach, by both ECE and the EPF coordinator would likely have helped pick up the hearing and vision problems earlier.

**Table 5: Contribution of ECE and EPF to supporting home learning activities for children in “Very positive learning foundations and a way to go” group**

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<tr>
<th>Child</th>
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<th>Parent comment</th>
<th>How EPF coordinator helped</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Aaron</strong>&lt;br&gt;Aaron’s dad is busy with other children at home. He described his input as “relaxed—it’s more what you did at kindergarten today? Get [him] thinking about what he’s done when it’s fresh in [his] mind […] it is quite difficult to have time with them all – we do what we can.”&lt;br&gt;Then at the kindergarten, they are really well equipped. They cater to each kid’s individual learning needs. The kindergarten keeps a portfolio book for each individual child and you can bring it home when you want to have a look through it. They add the work they have been doing or photos. Little updates to let you know what’s been going on. They also have a website called Story Park, they update that with a lot of photos. Like a little mini Facebook profile for your child that only you can see. You can have a look and see what they have been up to. … It’s quite good.</td>
<td>Note: Coordinator did Early Learning Plans with the grandmother because the dad was not well at the time. Dad’s comments were about the mainly practical support the coordinator gave for himself as a parent and for his children. She had organised the van to transport [Aaron] to kindergarten. She was a participant in a meeting with Group Special Education, the ECE teacher, the school teacher and the father about Aaron. “Anything that crops up of anything I need I always have the option of contacting [coordinator]. I am quite comfortable—I have support.</td>
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<td><strong>Masina</strong>&lt;br&gt;Mum is “pretty busy with others. Individually I work on her self-confidence because she is very shy. She will do anything around me. But group activities she won’t. We actually have a bedtime [routine], clean the lounge all the stuff off the floor. Children sit in front of me all three. Then they actually take turns to do a song, say a speech or whatever. They have arguments about how long. Masina would recite about her day … Talks to children about their day (on advice from EFP coordinator).&lt;br&gt;It’s hard to say if she is learning to get on with others—in a couple of incidents she can’t be bothered playing. She learned the Niuean language. She learned how to count, count backwards; does art work. She loves face painting and painting. She learned how to wrap things up in sellotape and paper – she made gifts for people.</td>
<td>Coordinator acts as a source of information about what is happening at the kindergarten. “She talks about Masina’s reaction to other kids and what she is doing, explains things she does. See if I need a ride cos I don’t have a vehicle.” Offers advice: “Coordinator suggested a few things. She asked what do they like to do?—sit in front of the TV? She suggested I put them around the table while I am cooking, talk to them. Ask what they are doing.” The mum did not know about ELP. “She’s written some stuff down but I don’t actually know” (Masina’s mum).</td>
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<td><strong>Sefa</strong>&lt;br&gt;Sefa lives in an extended family household where his grandmother is an educator for a homebased service. Sefa moved from the home-based to kindergarten at 4-years. The coordinator provides information and resources for reading and writing ABC activities for the home-based service and also supported Sefa’s move to kindergarten. Mum reads to Sefa and ‘tells’ stories as well as encouraging him to write. He loves to watch TV, move around and listen to music.&lt;br&gt;He can spell his name, he can write his name … when he goes to kindy they lay down their name and they have to pick their name off the table. He knows it starts with S so he goes through the Ss, and picked it off the table. And then they sign in as well, they scribble, so he’s doing that as well. And the books, they provide books, he can make stories out of books instead of me writing in the—that’s the big learning that I’ve found with him, so the book he can create his own story. They are very consistent when he goes to school as well [rules and boundaries] and … He’s speaking a lot of English now.</td>
<td>She provided the information, she brings some information, talked to mum [Grandparent] about what should be a home-based educator, and the benefit of taking them to kindy—the difference; it will be a bonus for him for his learning and he will interact with other kids, they have proper resources and learn how to write and everything; and here it’s just looking after them, making sure they are safe. They do colouring in things but not very much, they like doing things on their own. So with her help Mum see another view of the kindy (Sefa’s mum).</td>
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<td><strong>Alisi</strong>&lt;br&gt;Mum likes Alisi to go to ECE as when she stays home her and her sibling argue. Otherwise when at home she plays with her older siblings and on her own with her ‘toys’. Alisi loves to dance, Cook Island dance.&lt;br&gt;Cultural wise she sings Island songs from school. They do dancing—she loves dancing, that’s about it culturally-wise. [Social] She’s very friendly, very easy going with other kids. Before she tend to sit by herself but now she runs to her friends and she says ‘hi’ and saying hello to Papa and Mama and&lt;br&gt;When we first started at the playgroup (now the Education and Care centre) she was wanting me to join in … I was participating with taking Alisi—teaching as well giving a hand with the little ones. She was giving info to me—the playgroup will be closed down and it’s going to be a new school … I don’t</td>
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### Child Home learning activities

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hemi</td>
<td>Mum chose Te Kura so she could teach Hemi at home. They do literacy worksheets in the morning, then go to the park, then back home to play games, then have lunch. The coordinator provides resources and support to help implement the Te Kura programme. Hemi likes to play games on the computer with his siblings.</td>
<td>With correspondence, they’ll send me where he’s at. But I usually write what I’d like him to do for the next one. When we first started the programme was to get him to recognise his alphabet, and I had his numbers and we work from that. I did one whole month just with him to do colours and shapes. Learning on those and as the months went on we just add more to his work. … It’s mainly his colours and his shapes and his ABCs and his 123s, is what I wanted him to know first and that’s where he’s pretty much focused. They send storybooks and music and they ask what is he into to and I tell them he likes Marvel and Spiderman and all that stuff. So, they will send some stuff with pictures for him with stuff like that, so he will know. Then it will be S and for Batman it will be B cos he knows the characters. So it can lock into his memory the letter B.</td>
<td>volunteer now seeing it’s licensed. … She helping me with all the filling in [of enrolment forms]—I was stuck with the hours and the days and I was “how do you fill in this?” I got it all except for the timing and the days; I don’t get this—too many boxes. During home visits she talks about Alisi she talks about how she is at school—says “she’s good” [no mention of suggestions for activities] (Alisi’s mum).</td>
<td>She comes in through things like for example correspondence haven’t done things for me or I need something for Hemi, could be like more letters, more alphabets, so she’ll go up [to her office] and she’ll photocopy it and she’ll drop it off for Hemi. His school stuff—little extras. Usually she does that when the school rings for more work to come through and they need it … [about reading letters] it was “a” but that was back in my day but now you talk to them in a way that they want to learn and that’s what I’ve learnt that I can do, whereas before I was just plain and simple. Learnt that through [coordinator] that there’s other ways to teach your kids (Hemi’s mum).</td>
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<td>Caleb</td>
<td>Mum was referred to the coordinator through Family Start. Mum follows activities suggested by the coordinator and the ECE but Caleb gets easily distracted. They sometimes go to Mainly Music and the library. The family lost contact with the coordinator for a while.</td>
<td>The school [ECE] always tell me to read a book to him once a day. Also I got given these cool little things that they colour in and they trace and they draw. Also um, just basically take him outside, throw a ball around, sports—rugby um, watch a bit of TV with him—Maori TV for example cos they’ve got Maori there, yeah just normal. Yeah, just normal stuff, go out when we can like for bus rides or train rides. … He comes back and teaches me some stuff that I don’t know. Like, one of his karakias, that’s so nice to karakia when he sits down and has something to eat, it was different.</td>
<td>I’ve only had one ELP but the biggest goal was to actually get the kids to daycare on schedule, so in saying that—I all I did was working with mother to help her best work with her children, like the language that mother uses and the things her and her partner talk about around the children, so it was things around that. … I did share with mum to sing to him every day the alphabet words and; and they’ll learn and memorise it and learn. When I’m with Caleb I will ask him about what colours and counting and I will use my fingers and count with him so he can visualise it and can use his fingers as guidelines. I do all I can in that little time with him—supporting him and doing laces and he drops his sad a lot cos he gets frustrated; then I’ll talk to him and encourage him and then he’ll attempt to do the laces or something; he’s such a willing boy whereas before he would say ‘f off’. (EPF coordinator).</td>
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</table>
| Aiden | He draws a lot. Plays on the game (PlayStation) a lot. I teach him how to log into profiles and stuff and he watches and clicks to it straight | Kindy has a good structure. He comes back tired and has enjoyed his day. Same routine but they send pamphlets and do things like cooking on different days. … He has interactions with other | The coordinator provides “heaps—comes and drops stuff off monthly for him (colouring in stuff, puzzles…) Of the previous co-ordinator: She loved the kids. Uses to come over and say ‘Is
### Child Home learning activities

- Blake
- Aiden

#### Home learning activities
- Portfolio, doesn’t get sent home but you can go in there and read it and then they get it when they leave.
- I’ve seen my sister’s kids, his cousins reading it and it’s just wicked ay they learn from the photos and stuff.

#### How ECE service helped

- tamariki and interacts different with cousins when at kindy. He is good with numbers, alphabet, heaps of songs, comes home and does the haka. They were studying something Māori. They sing Māori songs, heaps of Māori songs. He’s keen to go with the teachers. Some mornings he doesn’t want to go there but they say ‘come on Aiden’ and they take him and put him in the van. Have a main van driver but also have different teachers that come to do morning pick-ups.

#### How EPF coordinator helped

- Aiden at kindy? ‘Oh na, he can’t go today he’s got no lunch.’ ‘Oh well chuck him in the car I’ll get him some lunch.’
- The dad described the drop offs and pick-ups (in the van) and provision of lunch as helpful for the family.

#### Parent comment

- ‘Oh na, he can’t go today he’s got no lunch.’
- ‘Oh well chuck him in the car I’ll get him some lunch.’

### Blake

- Mum meets the coordinators [there are two] at the ECE. Mum pulled out of one ECE and enrolled in a Pasifika language ECE so Blake could learn the language. Blake’s parents read to him and play counting games at home. Blake plays games on his father’s phone. Blake’s parents have taught him self-care, e.g. correct toileting procedures as he does not want to ask for help at ECE.

#### Education; I reckon he’s become smarter. I mean he’s learning, he likes to learn everything. His numbers, how to write, colours and now he really, really likes us reading to him. His shapes. Social—he’s always been on his own, he’s good on his own and with friends. He has friends there and he’s a lot with them. I think he picks up things from other children, like his behaviour, becoming naughty and all those habits, like poking tongue, that’s new. He’s constantly doing that. He talks back. … In his learning, he knows more Māori words than we do. He’s smart—he knows every colour in English and in Māori. We don’t know them all. He knows his language and his dance.

#### When I take him they’re [the coordinators] always there. One of the mamas she tell us they here to support the children and also the families as well, what they do and that’s how I met them … Just the one time [to the house] they dropped us off they came. That’s all. I always go down to be at the school (Blake’s mum).
Table 6: Contribution of ECE and EPF to supporting home learning activities for children in “Slightly positive learning foundations and a way to go” group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Home Learning Activities</th>
<th>How ECE service helped</th>
<th>Parent comment</th>
<th>How EPF coordinator helped</th>
<th>Parent comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Mum reads with Hannah and uses the resources provided by the coordinator to help Hannah write her name and trace the letters of the alphabet and shapes; as well as counting to ten as suggested by the coordinator.</td>
<td>She tends to talk a lot more now; I’ve noticed Hannah has put so much more words into her sentences. I’ve noticed she’s also opened a lot towards people. Well Hannah’s come back with quite a lot of drawings. I guess they teach you how to write and how to do colours. When I look at her picture, yes she’s doing quite a lot of lettering amongst her drawings. I do compliment her on her pictures.</td>
<td>She’s actually brought playdough for her; and she’s also brought this card thing that’s where she can do alphabets and drawing and lessons. She’s encouraging Hannah to write out letters and shapes and everything (Hannah’s mum).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rangi</td>
<td>The coordinator is the link between ECE and home informing mum about Rangi’s behaviour and learning at ECE. Rangi is described by Mum and ECE as ‘watching’ other children rather than interacting. He draws with his brother and likes to dress up.</td>
<td>It would be his singing, doing things like that, singing, dancing. He’s actually singing more. Tries to count, he tries to say his colours, even though it’s wrong; I try to correct him but it doesn’t matter. … Rangi is actually dressing up a lot more, costumes and stuff like that plus he goes through his clothes all the time and pulls out all sorts of stuff, sometimes he may come home in a batman outfit (Rangi’s mum)</td>
<td>[She] has been coming regularly checking up on how Rangi’s been doing. I just saw her today at my dad’s. She lets me know about trips and stuff that is coming up, how he’s doing at kindy, if I’ve got any concerns about things. … [She] visits the kindergarten. She lets me know that he’s good and he’s improving his behaviour and his learning (Rangi’s mum).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Jason has several siblings. He was moved from kōhanga to his current ECE. His mother does the ‘homework’ provided by the coordinator with him. His mother has concerns about his communication and social skills.</td>
<td>His self-esteem—he was shy—he’d sit in the corner and look at everyone. Now I’ve seen him more engaging. He does have a problem with people staring at him. If he sees someone staring, he goes “don’t look at me like that”. He takes it the wrong way, someone looks at him, or a little bit too long. … I think he might be making friends up. I’ll have to ask that when I go up there. … I’ve seen a lot more learning from him there than in the whole year he was at kōhanga. So in that short time he’s counting way past ten now and just the singing and everything.</td>
<td>She brings Jason homework for him to do, like ABCs, learning to write, getting him familiar with holding a pencil and learning how to write. Also checking in to see if he knows his numbers from one to ten which he already does anyway through his previous kōhanga and ensuring he’s got the alphabet as well which he’s struggling a bit on (Jason’s mum).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>I sit down sometimes and read books. Give him paper and pen. Practice writing his name. Husband and I – we always talk. It’s good to talk.</td>
<td>Because he learn a lot. He knows how to behave between him and other kids. Sharing. Parent hasn’t looked at Mark’s portfolio but “saw a folder with photos on it” at the lady’s house when he was in home-based ECE.</td>
<td>Coordinator was described by the parent as being very helpful in arranging access to the kindergarten and talking about kindergarten.</td>
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</table>

EPF coordinators largely spoke about the importance of building a relationship with families and then setting goals which were relevant to the family’s needs in order to build a platform on which to support the parent’s understanding of the benefits of ECE and in turn the children’s learning. As one EPF coordinator explained:

“Once I feel comfortable, mum is comfortable and the child is comfortable to talk to me; it can take a while; that is that confidence and self-esteem; then it’s just a matter of communicating with the family, with mum or with dad; setting achievable goals, … First of all they [mums] want them to do ABCs and whatnot; and I say “before you get to that stage, let’s just start right at the beginning and build them up to that; if they’re not confident enough, you’re not going to get that success out of them”.

EPF coordinators largely spoke about the importance of building a relationship with families and then setting goals which were relevant to the family’s needs in order to build a platform on which to support the parent’s understanding of the benefits of ECE and in turn the children’s learning. As one EPF coordinator explained:
However, all EPF coordinators did not play an active role in learning for all children, as evidenced by the following comment: “[The EPF coordinator] got her into kindy and paid a couple of visits. I haven’t seen her after the last visit she paid me.”

**Case study of factors contributing to a very positive change trajectory: Caleb**

Caleb is the oldest of his siblings, and has lived in another part of New Zealand until recently. His mother and father are both Māori. The mother said she moved to the new community “for a better life” for herself and her family. Family Start referred the mother to the EPF coordinator. Speaking of her first meeting with the coordinator, the mother said:

> She introduced herself and I felt very welcomed, for myself I felt very welcomed from her and she just explained everything to me and I said “Oh yeah, that’s us, can we do it now? … Her support of doing that, I don’t think the kids would be anywhere at this point.”

The mother explained she received good advice and the co-ordinator matched Caleb’s needs with an ECE centre, which “would be the best for his ability and education-wise”. The coordinator also fully explained the programme, unlike other places where the mother was just given a brochure. So, the mother checked the centre out and signed up.

The coordinator said the main goals were to get the children to the centre (the coordinator helped at first by picking the family up and dropping them off), to help the family use appropriate language around the children and for Caleb to learn social skills.

The ECE centre itself is a TAP-funded centre in the family’s community that offered a bicultural curriculum and inclusive environment, with well-formed connections to local agencies and organisations. At first, Caleb came three days per week; soon this was increased to five days, 9 to 3.00. A focus was on Caleb’s social interactions. The teaching team read literature, discussed issues and worked on being consistent; they also had discussions with the parents. In assessment documentation, the teachers stressed the positive and wrote about how far Caleb had come and what he can do. For example, in a learning story, turn taking was illustrated. The teacher had written that when there is a problem, take a moment to breathe, ask for help and together we will solve it. Caleb learned about rules and boundaries around kissing and hugging and what he could and could not do. He became better able to cope with change; initially he used to hide or scream if there was a change he did not want. Early literacy and numeracy skills were also a focus. His te reo Māori, also learned at home, and English developed further. A letter in his portfolio invited Caleb to stay at ECE a bit longer before starting school. The letter invited him to keep practising his numbers, alphabet and colours and talk about rules such as sitting at the table. Caleb stayed at the centre for another term when he turned five to become better prepared for school. Over this time, three school visits were made.

The teachers communicated with mum and dad all the time, “when they are coming in and out, and we’ve been encouraging them to stay at the centre. Mum has done that, a number of times she’s stayed just about all day, a few times. But there’s been lots of talking at the beginning and end of the day, send the portfolio books home.” A letter in the portfolio thanked Caleb’s mum for contributing during Māori language week.

Caleb progressed over this time, particularly in respect to Communication and social interactions. The factors contributing to this very positive change trajectory came from the input of all parties working together. The EPF coordinator facilitated access to ECE in the first place. A welcoming environment where parent contributions
were sought, respected and acknowledged invited parents to participate; changes occurred in the mum’s participation from coming to the centre with the EPF coordinator, to bringing Caleb herself and staying with him sometimes, to offering her expertise. The skills of the teaching team who carefully analysed and intentionally took steps to scaffold Caleb’s learning and development was an essential factor. Through participation in ECE with his family involved, Caleb became accustomed to social behaviour and expectations for relating to others in society. There was still a way to go but hopes were that if there were not changes in Caleb’s life and he had a small class, he would cope with school well. However, Caleb’s school start was disrupted when the family moved for a short time while dealing with issues. He was away from school for nearly a month. During this time, the EPF coordinator had managed to retain contact and linked in with them when they returned. The coordinator reported that Caleb was able to return to the same school, with the same teacher. The foundations developed while Caleb attended ECE and the support of the coordinator should stand him in good stead over a longer term.

Summary

The EPF coordinators played a crucial role in brokering access to ECE for the children in the sample and encouraging and supporting their regular attendance. All children in the study had regular attendance in ECE for between 18 and 30 hours per week, except for the Te Kura child who learned at home. Ten of the 18 children came to their service by van. Most families would not have enrolled their child without the help of the EPF coordinator or encouraged their regular attendance.

All children in our sample were described or observed to be developing positive learning foundations while participating in ECE and EPF. One group of five children was categorised as having strong learning foundations across all strands of Te Whāriki (except for two of these children on exploration indicators). Nine children had very positive learning foundations, especially related to communication, and still a way to go in terms of some Te Whāriki strands. A third group of four children had slightly positive learning foundations and a way to go in terms of all Te Whāriki strands.

Communication was highlighted in EPF, parent and ECE teacher interviews and documentation. Emphasis was placed on reading, writing and mathematics in line with parent wishes and teacher views that this would support school transition. Wellbeing was also strongly encouraged by most EPF coordinators and ECE services, including the ability to care for oneself, a competency that new entrant teachers found helpful. Indicators of exploration were less common in documentation, interview comments or observations for the case study children.

Most children had ear, vision and health checks while they were in ECE; and four children received specialist support. However, three children appeared to have health issues that were not identified by ECE teachers or EPF coordinators, including hearing and vision (subsequently identified at school), speech difficulties, and a learning disorder. More could have been done by the EPF coordinator and ECE setting in ensuring appropriate and timely checks for these children.

The months of attendance in ECE seemed to contribute to positive learning foundations. All children who were in the “strong foundations” group had attended ECE for more than six months; five children in other groups had less than six months attendance, suggesting more time in ECE could have been useful. Children who had attended for less time had not been in the EPF programme for long.

Factors supporting children’s learning were

- opportunities for social interactions with other children and adults provided through ECE;
- the understanding and pedagogical interactions of teachers/educators in the ECE setting; and
- the attention paid to learning activities in the home environment.

There was variability in the learning activities said to be carried out in the home setting, in the input of the EPF coordinator to home learning, and in the information about learning gained from the ECE setting. Some EPF coordinators played a key role in formulating goals with the family and suggesting activities focused on learning. Parents found out about their children’s learning in the ECE setting by observing activities, having information conveyed by the ECE teacher through documentation and talking, or through the EPF coordinator telling the parent about the child’s day. The role of the EPF coordinator as a conduit for information was particularly evident for families whose children were transported by van to the ECE setting although one teacher thought this detracted from her ability to have a direct relationship with the parent.
4. Transition to school

Transition to school was examined through analysis of data derived from new entrant teacher interviews and parent interviews about how the child experienced the transition and ECE teacher and EPF coordinator interviews about the child’s readiness for school. We developed indicators derived from these data sources to map the child’s transition experience against the Key Competencies of the New Zealand Curriculum and the strands of Te Whāriki, as aligned in the cross sector Key Competencies diagram within the NZC (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 42). The Key Competencies and indicators were:

1. Managing self: child is settled and happy within a week; manages own needs; adjusts to routines (e.g. puts clothes on peg, follows teacher instructions); is described as ‘ready’ for school; child is confident.

2. Relating to others: Co-operative interactions with others; cares for others.

3. Participating and contributing: Child is confident to express a view; contributes; is engaged; perseveres with difficulty.


We used this framing to map the degree to which the child’s transition to school was experienced as positive and how the child coped within the classroom. The Methodology section provides more detail.

There were a range of experiences of transitions. One group of four children experienced transition as very positive, one group of six children experienced smooth transitions but had some issues, and one group of three children experienced transition as difficult and had some challenges. We were not able to follow up a third group of five children—the reasons for why four of these left the study and one remained in ECE and did not transition are provided in Table 7.

Table 7 shows patterns of experiences of transitions for individual children. Analysis of the range shows that the ‘very positive transition’ group were positively rated on all the Key Competencies and settled reasonably quickly. The second group of children tended to settle reasonably quickly but had issues in various aspects of classroom work. The third group did not settle quickly and experienced challenges in classroom work.
### Table 7: Transition to school patterns of strength (individual children)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Settled and happy after a week</th>
<th>Looks after self</th>
<th>Confident</th>
<th>Described as “ready for school”</th>
<th>Managing self Wellbeing</th>
<th>Cooperative interactions with others</th>
<th>Cares for others</th>
<th>Relating to others</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
<th>Child is confident to express a view, contribute; Engaged, focused Persevering</th>
<th>Participating and contributing Belonging</th>
<th>Problem solving</th>
<th>Working theories</th>
<th>Thinking Exploration</th>
<th>Familiarity and enjoyment reading, writing, mathematics</th>
<th>Creative and expressive</th>
<th>Using language symbols and texts</th>
<th>Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xavier</td>
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<td>Very positive transitions</td>
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<td>Roimata</td>
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<td>Smooth transition but some issues</td>
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<td>Smooth transition but some issues</td>
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<td>Malaki</td>
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<td>Sefa</td>
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<td>Blake Family moved overseas</td>
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<td>Riley</td>
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<td>Aaron</td>
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<td>Mark Health issues interrupted transition to school</td>
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<td>Mark Health issues interrupted transition to school</td>
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<td>Hannah</td>
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<td>Aiden Change of primary caregiver and change of location</td>
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<td>Masina</td>
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<td>Jason Remained in ECE</td>
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*The dark shaded areas show where indicators are particularly strong, lighter shades where moderately strong but some issues, and unshaded areas where no information or challenges.

Overall, indicators related to the Key Competencies of Managing Self, Using Languages Symbols and Texts and Relating to others were given emphasis by new entrant teachers as supporting transition. Figure 2 shows the patterns of strength were variable for all children across the key competencies.
Managing Self Key Competency

Nine of 13 children were described as settling within a week, and most of these were able to do basic things including adapting to routines, managing their own behaviour and looking after themselves and their belongings. For example, Salesi was said to “go straight into sitting at mat, mat behaviour” compared with “those that up and run around because they feel like it”. Xavier was described by the new entrant teacher as “quite independent. He works well with other kids but he wasn’t in the corner waiting for me to come and get him, you know, he was quite able to follow a task board and help himself out if he needed something you know. He could toilet himself. He could come back to the class after he had been in the toilet and all those sorts of things.” Self-care seems to be viewed as important for a smooth transition by the new entrant teachers in this study.

Parents and new entrant teachers regarded transition from different perspectives and what they emphasised sometimes varied. Aaron’s dad was very happy with how smoothly transition had gone for Aaron.

Aaron had some extra needs. Like he’s not autistic but had some of those symptoms. He’s enjoying it a lot. For instance he likes to run off and explore and he often has entire classrooms looking for him cos he ran off to the top field or something. The school’s been really good. They pretty well assigned a caretaker to him. Pretty much full time.

This dad saw further development in Aaron’s speech since starting school. He was pleased Aaron was making friends at school as he had thought, “that with the issue Aaron had he might be shunned a bit. But no. Quite the opposite.”

Aaron’s new entrant teacher, who has training in special needs, said Aaron had taken longer to settle than usual. He uses Heart Rate Variability technology to measure the stress levels of a child’s nervous system; unusually high heart rates are a sign of stress. Aaron’s was high and had a pattern of “spiking”. High heart rate affects capacity to learn; so the teacher is teaching Aaron stress awareness and management, and a particular breathing technique that helps him think more calmly for longer.

Much discussion and negotiation was spent on Aaron’s transition before he started at school. A meeting was held at the kindergarten of all concerned, the father, the school’s Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour (RTLB), the Ministry of Education Early Intervention Teacher (EIT) involved with Aaron, the kindergarten teachers and
the school coordinator. The meeting was instigated and organised by the Ministry of Education EIT working with the kindergarten teacher. They, the father and RTLB were to attend, the aim being to hear from each party on views about whether Aaron should start school when he turned five, and to discuss application for ORS funding. The meeting had not been held at the time of interviews; when asked, the kindergarten teacher thought it would be a good idea to involve the EPF coordinator in the meeting. Following this meeting and before Aaron started school, an application was submitted for ORS funding, but that was declined. When Aaron first started school, the Ministry of Education EIT worked with Aaron in the school for about 6 weeks to support his transition. In this time, the school coordinator and EIT devised a safety plan and then an individual management plan to keep Aaron safe e.g., from running away, lashing out. The school principal applied for interim funding for a teacher aide and then another round of interim funding while a school fence was being built. Over this time application for three reviews of ORS were submitted but all were declined. The school regards Aaron as very high needs and in need of a dedicated teacher aide and access to specialist services on an ongoing basis. Despite these issues, the transition process was well supported by the kindergarten teachers and EIT, and would have been much more difficult had Aaron “just turned up” with no prior discussions. During this period the EPF coordinator talked to the school principal to help “prepare” for Aaron coming to school and to advise them she would be involved for at least three months. She said she already had a good relationship with the school principal.

On the challenging side, children who did not settle quickly were described variously, e.g., “not being ready and yelling out” (Caleb), “having no routines” (Hannah), “crying a bit” (Sefa) or “not answering” (Rangi). Hannah’s teacher explained what she meant by self-management:

> Just simple routines, you know, if you stand up you push in your chair, if you are hot you take your jumper off, you don’t just sit there sweating, zipping up your bag, putting your lunchbox back in your bag, simple things like that [self-care?] yes self-management, thinking it’s not going to get done unless I do it.

Rangi was described as always asking, “Can I go home now?” when he first attended school. He had just been diagnosed by the school nurse as having hearing and vision issues, also noticed by the new entrant teacher: “He can be right near me like within a metre and I say his name and he doesn’t even turn his head. If they can’t hear it can do all sorts of things I think.” Rangi, who had attended an education and care centre for over a year, was rated by the ECE supervisor as “not ready” with words and numbers and having poor listening skills. When asked about Rangi’s Before School Check, the centre supervisor said she did not know whether this had been done. Neither Rangi’s ECE teacher, nor the EPF provider flagged any issues regarding hearing and vision, rather Rangi was described as “not listening” and lacking “focus”.

Using Language Symbols and Texts Key Competency

Several teachers had an expectation that children would be able to hold a pencil, write and recognise their own name and do simple counting. All the children in the ‘very positive transition’ group could do these; so too could some other children. Aaron was described by the new entrant teacher as “onto it in terms of reading. He writes his own name. He has flashes of brilliance”. This teacher thought Aaron could read and that kindergarten had helped a lot. Sefa knew both Tongan and English: his new entrant teacher recognised his proficiency and spoke these languages too, making a bridge with home and ECE centre experiences.

The communication focus of new entrant teachers seemed to be predominantly related to print-based literacies and clarity of oral language. Even within this domain, we found that sometimes new entrant teachers underestimated what children could do when our data from the ECE setting had shown a more competent child. The ECE teacher of Hemi, who attended Te Kura, had given us samples of drawings and writing, including writing of his own name. But the new entrant teacher claimed that Hemi could not write when he arrived at school and could only do
basic counting. “Today he wrote his name and that’s the first time. I thought ‘Oh my gosh, wow that’s so
awesome’. I must give him a sticker for that later. But that’s taken last term, that time when he started and this
term.” Hemi on the other hand complained to his mum that school was boring because he was repeating what he
already knew. Similarly, Caleb remained in ECE for a few months after turning five on the encouragement of the
supervisor so that he could have more time developing necessary social skills and some comprehension of the
basics of counting, alphabet, and writing. His ECE supervisor said:

I had to try and talk to Mum about [that] he could benefit from just a little bit longer. As it’s
turned out, it’s gone for a whole term which I think will really help Caleb when he gets to school.
I think there’ll still be some issues around boundaries and things for Caleb when he gets there.
But I think he needs to learn the rules of the school now rather than what’s here.

His ECE supervisor also commented:

I think he’s quite well prepared now. I think he will do okay in a classroom setting. I think he’s
got the social skills now. They might let him down occasionally, but I think overall he’ll be good.
I hope he doesn’t go into a huge big class because he will just get lost and gobbled up…. I think
he’ll do well. He’s got the early literacy and numeracy skills and he’s got the hunger to learn now
as well. Which I think is really important and he’s really interested in learning new things and
trying out new things and that will steer him in good stead when he moves into the classroom
which will be all new for him.

Caleb and his family were supported in the initial transition process to school by the EPF coordinator who took
Caleb and his family to the school to enrol them, and the ECE teachers who took Caleb on his school visits; which
were said to go well: “He’s slotted in with what the class are doing, communicated with the other children, he’s
just been perfect. And he’s walked there, and walked back as well with the teacher. He hasn’t gone with his
parents, we’ve supported that”.

However, Caleb faced several challenges when he actually started school. Due to roll growth the school had
established a new classroom so he was not placed in the class with the teacher he had met previously. When he
did start school, the teacher commented that she was new to the school and had no information on the children in
her class. Then his school start was disrupted when due to family issues the mother took the children and suddenly
left for [city], without notifying the school, after three weeks. The new entrant teacher said:

We had three weeks with him, before he’s gone off and now it’s going into his third week of
being absent. ... the only thing about it is we got a teacher aide; I was able to get some help and it
was going to be directed to him.

The ECE teacher had worried that such inconsistency would create issues for Caleb.

Hopefully he has consistent attendance at school. I think that will be important, especially in the
beginning. Hopefully they don’t have to go away for a week at a time so they have a whole week
off when he’s starting cos he’ll be forming those new friendships and things and learning the
rules of the setting.

Those competencies that Caleb had developed at ECE were not recognised on pre-testing at school. The new
entrant teacher said: “I did a pre-test on him and he didn’t know a lot of difference between his letters and
number, and even didn’t recognise the letters of his own name.” The new entrant teacher did however, recognise
and value that he loved music and was able to speak te reo. It could be that the testing situation was strange to
Caleb and did not enable him to show what he could do.
It would seem that for Caleb the changes he faced also impacted on his behaviour, overwhelming the progress he had made in ECE. His teacher described his behaviour when faced with direction from her:

> He had almost toddler-like tantrums, where as soon as he’s been directed or being guided he gets upset with that; he wants to do what he wants to do when he wants to do it and if he can’t he will lie [down] and cry; and we’ve got the crying less and less … those first few days he would scream and tell me he couldn’t do something.

Caleb did eventually return to the school, to the same classroom after nearly a month away. During this time, the EPF coordinator continued to drop by their home to see if they had returned; and was able to resume contact with mum who required support around the family issues.

**Relating to Others Key Competency**

The Key Competency ‘Relating to others’ is described as being about “interacting effectively with a diverse range of people in a variety of contexts” and includes listening actively, being able to recognise different points of view, negotiate and share ideas (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 12). All five children with positive transitions and two others were described as having cooperative and caring relationships with others. Good social relationships can support a smooth transition by helping a person become accepted and part of a group from the beginning.

Children experiencing poorer relationships sometimes had behavioural issues that disrupted the classroom. Three children were described in this way, e.g., “always punching kids, kicking kids” and “having behaviour tantrums”. Each of the three children, Hemi, Rangi and Caleb, were described as having issues with communication prior to starting school. Hemi’s EPF coordinator noted that “because he’s just with Mum and at home and not really interacting with a lot of outside people that he might find school a bit of a struggle because he doesn’t know how to communicate to them”. Hemi was enrolled in Te Kura so the coordinator encouraged his mother to join community activities to help develop better communication. His mother was also strongly encouraged to visit the school with him, however this did not eventuate. Rangi who had undiagnosed vision and hearing problems, was described by his teacher as “one of our challenging behaviour child, you know like with hitting kind of things”. While Rangi went with his ECE on visits to the ECE’s local school; he was enrolled and started at the school his brother attended, but had no pre-visits there. An ECE centre had supported one of these children, Caleb (see case study in Chapter 3 on Learning Foundations), and discussion on the page above), to behave in more positive ways in situations that in the past provoked him to have “meltdowns”. In school, the “meltdowns” became common again. Caleb’s new entrant teacher suggested that even more transition visits (Caleb had three) and a shorter day to start with might have been helpful.
Participating and contributing, and thinking Key Competencies

Participating and contributing, and Thinking were less commonly noted competencies. Yet we gathered some valuable examples from new entrant teachers for a few children. For example, speaking of Salesi’s willingness to persevere and to think about perseverance as a quality, and her own efforts to reinforce perseverance as a valued competency, the new entrant teacher gave this example:

And again one of the picture books that we have here which is called Keep Trying, so that’s been one of our little mantras that they say often too, and the saying in it is keep trying, you can do it and he could, so all about a boy who’s learning new things, so they know that when they’re stuck they keep trying: you can do it, yeah which actually, speaking of Salesi, which was quite funny, we had [a national sports team], they popped in to do a bit of a promo and they were playing the next day, and Salesi said to them, ‘Well if it gets tough you should keep trying, and if you miss a goal, you should keep trying.’ So that was our picture book on top but it was really cute the way he said that to one of our national teams.

Salesi’s mum spoke of his confidence and knowing his own mind when she took him on the first day of school:

He was good, he was excited. I took him into class and he just stood up and introduced himself. They didn’t have to ask him. The teacher just said “I’ve got a new student in class” and then he just stood up and said, “My name is Salesi”. Then he just told me to leave. I know … and then I told my mum she can just go back in at lunch time. Then he told her to leave. Yeah, he was settling in really fast.

Complex transitions for children who left the study

Four children moved cities or did not stay at the school that they initially transitioned to. Another child stayed at ECE for longer than planned after he turned five. Various reasons for moves of the four children are highlighted in this section.

Factors within the families’ living situations complicated the unpredictable transitions for this group of children. The extent of collaborations and shared understandings that Dockett and Perry (2014) refer to, in this case between families/whānau, ECE teachers/educators, the EPF coordinators and school, critically influence the ways that children experience transitions. The experiences of these children demonstrate some of the diverse ways that changes in living situations may play out, and the possible impact of beneficial learning foundations but limited collaborations that make for complex transitions to school.

Most parents did not know in advance which school the child would attend, due to family changes in where they lived, who they lived with or where the parent/s worked. Anahera’s mother is a student, for example, and the family’s living arrangements depend on her place of study. Aiden’s ECE teachers knew the school where the family intended to enrol him, joining a number of his cousins (“so he will be fine”), however, Aiden moved to another city with one of his parents within days of his entry to school. Blake moved to another country, and Anahera shifted between cities in the time immediately before her transition to school. Mark had health issues that interrupted his transition to school. Family unpredictability and transience did not necessarily impact negatively on children’s perceived readiness for a positive transition to school, but they did play a part in children not going to the intended school.

A dominant factor for these four families is their transience. Developing collaborations and shared understanding through for example; all those involved in children’s lives having conversations and opportunities to ask questions and speak to school teachers, becomes difficult, or interrupted, when families move away or their circumstances
change. On the other hand, our data shows that for many other children, such interactions were limited even when they had not experienced change. We do not know whether the parents were able to introduce their child in advance to their school environment, or to familiarise themselves beforehand with their school teachers. We would conjecture that the familiarity with school environments engendered through visits by some of the ECE centres would help these children as would parents’ understanding of the value of their participation. In addition, EPF coordinators of Anahera and Mark remained in contact with the parents through this time, offering support and advice. A positive orientation towards school and learning foundations (from new entrant teacher viewpoints especially linked to wellbeing, contribution and communication) would likely have supported their ability to contribute confidently even in an unknown setting. All four children were developing over these domains, and Anahera had strong foundations across all domains, as indicated in Table 1. Anahera’s ECE teacher commented that she would be “confident enough to handle new entrants”. Aiden cried when his father took him to his first school (which he attended for a week before moving to another city). But according to the new entrant teacher and the principal, during that week he fitted in well with the other eight children who began at the same time. Mark’s teacher, who had Mark at school for three days before he became ill, had put Mark’s name down for a teacher aide to help him write letters and show him how to hold his pencil properly.

These children’s situations demonstrate the overall complexity of transition experiences. The transition to school process may become secondary to family realities.

Factors contributing to positive transitions

We next examine factors for the three groups of children that might have contributed to more or less positive transitions and whether these might help explain children’s experiences. To provide the context, Table 8 sets out for each child the processes occurring that might be expected to support transition; school visits, health and Before School Checks, information sent to school, the nature of involvement of parent/s, the ECE service and the EPF coordinator, and challenges and strengths identified for the child.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>School visits</th>
<th>ECE involvement/discussion with parents</th>
<th>EPF coordinator</th>
<th>Health/Before School Checks</th>
<th>Information sent to school</th>
<th>Transition to school programme</th>
<th>Challenges/ strengths identified in ECE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xavier</td>
<td>Mother, in discussion with ECE and EPF took responsibility for visits and enrolment.</td>
<td>ECE contacts parent by phone, email or letter as child travels in van. ECE provided support for parent around external issues.</td>
<td>Checked to ensure visits and enrolment were completed, child was in ECE transition programme and provided advice around funding for uniforms.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Integrated into the ECE programme.</td>
<td>Developing literacy and numeracy; leadership skills, strong social. Focused with good communication skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roimata</td>
<td>None—moved from SP to home-based two months prior to school start. Enrolled on the first day of school.</td>
<td>Home-based viewed transition as parent responsibility. The parent asked the office at school and they said ‘it’s ok’ just to arrive. Roimata has older siblings at the school.</td>
<td>Provided extra books and puzzles for Roimata and advice on learning for parent. Coordinator for SP remained in contact with Mum.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Unknown as at Tongan home-based.</td>
<td>Strong literacy and numeracy skills,- can count to 20 and count objects, write name and some letters. Parents and siblings do worksheets and reading in English with her at home. Roimata is bilingual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaki</td>
<td>Yes –with ECE. Enrolled on the first day of school by Mum.</td>
<td>ECE had ongoing conversations with Mum about learning foundations. Mum invited to join transition visits. Mum does HIPPY at home.</td>
<td>Discussed a transition plan with Mum but when checked Mum had not enrolled Malaki. Coordinator followed up to ensure enrolment was done and discussed school start.</td>
<td>ECE was unsure.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Strong literacy and numeracy skills, can write his name and form other letters and count to 10. Good social skills. Can sit on the mat and listen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Very positive transitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>School visits</th>
<th>ECE involvement/ discussion with parents</th>
<th>EPF coordinator</th>
<th>Health/ Before School Checks</th>
<th>Information sent to school</th>
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<th>Challenges/ strengths identified in ECE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salesi</td>
<td>Kindergarten took on school visit, visits library.</td>
<td>Informal discussion with parent who brings Salesi and sister to kindergarten. Story Park (ePortfolio) also used to communicate.</td>
<td>EPF coordinator spoke to mum about what she wanted, and discussed possible schools. On her behalf, talked to school principal of preferred school and filled in enrolment forms.</td>
<td>Yes, kindergarten organised Before School, vision and hearing checks and assess children for special needs at kindergarten.</td>
<td>ECE transition portfolio goes to school.</td>
<td>Transition portfolios and library visits.</td>
<td>Confident; knows he has a place; cares for others; copying letters; te reo and Samoan languages.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Smooth transition but some issues

<p>| Sefa | Yes to the local school. But attended a different school as out of zone for the local school. | ECE invited the family to attend events at the school. Feedback on learning through the portfolio. Communication with Aunty and Mum – mainly information on events. | Provided support for enrolment with documentation and information. Discussed the visits to be done – by Mum and Grandparent. | Yes—at Plunket. | No | Yes at kindergarten. | Recognises and writes his name, likes manipulative activities. Can count 1 to 5. Sitting and listening can be a challenge. However, moved school after just a few weeks— whereabouts unknown. Bilingual. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>School visits</th>
<th>ECE involvement/discussion with parents</th>
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<th>Challenges/strengths identified in ECE</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>School visits, talk about school “so it becomes familiar” and transition portfolio by ECE.</td>
<td>Communication through Story Park (ePortfolio), notes in lunch box where teacher knows these will be read, teacher talks with grandmother. Child comes by van and teacher a little “in the dark” about what dad thinks. , formal meeting with EIT and school RTLB.</td>
<td>Parent contacts the “hub” (EPF if absences—coordinator is go-between. Coordinator talked to school principal before school starting.</td>
<td>Visits to doctors, Hair Angels (lice), hearing and Before School Checks arranged by ECE. In addition, meeting re school starting and ORS funding application as described in case study.</td>
<td>Transition portfolio. Information through meeting of all parties concerned about school starting and specialist support.</td>
<td>Transition portfolios and visits.</td>
<td>Great vocabulary, not always grounded in context; loves numbers and mathematical concepts, but can be random; loves music; does not do imitative play. Starting to develop social competence and trust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>School visits</td>
<td>ECE involvement/ discussion with parents</td>
<td>EPF coordinator</td>
<td>Health/ Before School Checks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>No visits. Mum enrolled Hannah in December for the following year.</td>
<td>Limited contact between ECE and parent. A sibling takes Hannah to school and picks her up.</td>
<td>EPF coordinator is the link between ECE and Mum. ECE discusses progress with the coordinator. Coordinator discusses transition to school with Mum. Plan in place—coordinator visited to check enrolment was done and followed progress after school start.</td>
<td>Yes at ECE.</td>
<td>No. School invited Mum in—they have a programme to support parent participation in the child’s learning.</td>
<td>Yes—once a week—ECE felt Hannah needed more time to develop school readiness skills but Mum wanted her to start school so she joined the weekly transition programme.</td>
<td>Smooth transition but some issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masina</td>
<td>ECE organised transition visits; Masina met her teacher before starting school. Dad takes Masina to school—Masina ‘fitted in well’.</td>
<td>MOE pamphlet; transition portfolio—copy for school and home. ECE uses transition checklist about discussion with family.</td>
<td>Coordinator helps in whatever way mum wants, takes mum to appointments.</td>
<td>Yes. Before school, dental and hearing checks arranged by ECE; EPF coordinator supported getting parent to attend checks.</td>
<td>Booklet about dispositions and link to school competencies; Transition portfolio went to school.</td>
<td>ECE organises transition visits to school every fortnight, children sit on mat and do activities; regular walks to local library where librarian does mat time.</td>
<td>Can sometimes follow instructions and listen but does not always understand the instruction. According to ECE can copy her name. School said she is struggling. Her pronunciation is unclear and speaks in a ‘baby’ voice at times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alisi</td>
<td>Enrolled by Mum on the first day of school. No visits.</td>
<td>ECE had limited contact with Mum—teachers mainly convey information to Uncle (NESB) on events etc.</td>
<td>ECE seen as having good transition processes.</td>
<td>ECE unsure.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Went to Big Kids Club—the children take turns as spaces are limited.</td>
<td>Articulate, can count to ten. Described as willing to learn. Not writing her name or letters yet. Alisi seems to have ‘passed under the radar’ (escaped notice).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Challenging transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hemi</th>
<th>Not formally—but walked to school to collect siblings.</th>
<th>‘Off to school’ pack sent late as Te Kura unable to contact Mum. Report provided for Mum to give to—not passed on.</th>
<th>Discussed visits and enrolment with Mum. Mum wanted to do the visits herself; said she had but didn’t.</th>
<th>Yes—Plunket came home. Clash with Plunket visitor and Mum required mediation from EPF coordinator.</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Resources provided by EPF coordinator as Te Kura pack delayed—teacher was away.</th>
<th>Limited opportunities for social and emotional development. Can write some letters in his name.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rangi</td>
<td>Visits to school closest to ECE, not the school attended.</td>
<td>ECE had brief phone conversation with parent on behaviour. Feedback on interests through portfolio sent home.</td>
<td>Visited ECE and visited school after Rangi started. Brief conversation with parent about child rather than transition.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, early literacy and numeracy activities. Child said to lack focus.</td>
<td>Hearing and vision problems undiagnosed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caleb</td>
<td>Three visits to school attended.</td>
<td>ECE - Decision on school start date made in discussion with parents and EPF.</td>
<td>EPF coordinator supported school enrolment. Went on one visit with ECE.</td>
<td>Completed at ECE.</td>
<td>Portfolio shown during school visits. Information not passed on to Caleb’ teacher when she was employed.</td>
<td>Focus on social skills with early literacy and numeracy supported.</td>
<td>Erratic school attendance due to family dealing with issues.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Children who left the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blake</th>
<th>Family moved overseas.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anahera</td>
<td>Family moved to another city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Child had health issues that interrupted his transition to school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aiden</td>
<td>Change of primary caregiver and change of location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Remained in ECE.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Various factors in combination seemed to contribute to a positive transition to school. These were 1) the learning foundations developed in ECE; 2) continuity of transition support from ECE, parent and EPF coordinator; and 3) recognition of learning foundations by the new entrant teacher.

1. Strong learning foundations evidenced in ECE supported a very positive transition to school. Four of five children (Xavier, Roimata, Malaki, and Salesi) categorised as having strong learning foundations had very positive transitions: we would conjecture that the 5th child whom we could not follow through (Anahera), was well equipped for school too. The new entrant teachers noticed, valued and recognised the competencies of these children and described these positively. In addition, the transitions of Xavier, Malaki and Salesi were supported by continuity of support from ECE, parent and EPF coordinator. For Roimata, the partnership between parent and EPF coordinator contributed to ease of transition, with the parent taking primary responsibility; that the new entrant teacher knew the family and spoke their home language also provided familiarity for the parent and Roimata.

2. Continuity and depth of transition support was available for Sefa, Aaron, Masina and Caleb. For Hannah, a smooth transition to school was supported by the ongoing contact between mum and the EPF coordinator with further support seen from the new entrant teacher who invited Hannah’s mother to take part in a programme run by the school to support parent participation in children’s learning. Contact between the ECE and Hannah’s mother was largely through the EPF coordinator. Within this group, all but Caleb were categorised as having a smooth transition (but some issues). Sometimes, the new entrant teacher did not know that the child had been taken on school visits and that the child’s portfolio was available. This was the case with Masina and Caleb, showing information is not always passed on to the teacher whose class the child goes into.

3. Patterns of strength seen and documented in ECE were not always recognised by some new entrant teachers for children who were experiencing issues. This was particularly so for Caleb, who had developed well while in ECE and had strong support for his transition. Although the ECE teachers showed his portfolio on a school visit, this was not seen by Caleb’s teacher. In addition, Caleb had erratic school attendance due to family issues and seemed to revert to previous behaviour seen while he was first in ECE. Hemi was another child whose ability to write his own name was not recognised in the new entrant classroom. This may be due to a less holistic focus or an unfamiliar teaching style that did not enable children to show their strengths, such as the pre-tests carried out by some teachers to assess children’s ability to recognise letters and numbers as evidenced above. Alternatively, it may be that the children’s skills were seen as stronger than they were by ECE teachers and parents.

Information about the child from the ECE setting and EPF coordinator was only sometimes passed on to the school through meetings with the school. Only five instances were given of portfolios being provided for the new entrant teacher; four new entrant teachers thought that having the child’s portfolio would have helped their understanding and supported transition. Assessment documentation can contribute powerfully to support children’s transition particularly where these are discussed with the school and links are made between the early childhood curriculum and school curriculum (Mitchell et al., 2015). Parents were the main people who talked to the new entrant teacher about their child if they had opportunity.

EPF coordinators’ role in transition was generally described by both themselves and parents as working with parents to make sure they made a decision about which school their child might attend, how to go about enrolling the child, and to encourage school visits before actual attendance. There were two instances of the EPF coordinator being more involved in making direct contact with schools herself, and one of a coordinator visiting
the school with the ECE centre. However, new entrant teachers were generally unaware that the child enrolled in their classroom was part of the ECE Participation programme or what the programme entailed.

Once the child was at school, contact with EPF varied for the children in our study. In most instances, the EPF coordinator kept in contact with the family. Some coordinators stayed in close contact with families, visiting families to ensure they had enrolled and after school had started to discuss the transition for both the child and family. For Hannah’s mother this support gave her the incentive to carry out the enrolment which she may have left until the first day of school otherwise.

The coordinator wanted to know that I’d made that decision in enrolling (child name) in primary school. I said “yes”, so she wanted to know when I’m going to enrol her; … so she said as soon as you get the enrolment forms let me know; so she came for a visit next time and I showed her, she’s enrolled. Sometimes she can give a push and a shove, which is a good thing [laughed].

For a few families, contact was more sporadic, with contact involving catch-up phone calls, contact in the street or visits less than monthly. In these instances coordinators commented that either they considered families were capable of carrying out the transition process, or, that this would be done through ECE. As one coordinator said about the family enrolling, “I said it’s up to you; if there’s any hiccup just give us a buzz”. Families were accepting of this approach. Interestingly more focused contact was not always able to ease transition, for example in the case of Caleb where frequent absences due to family issues created issues impacting on transition. However, for two children, Alisi and Rangi, closer contact may have been helpful in checking to see whether processes such as Before School Checks were conducted and highlighting some of the learning foundations required for school readiness so the school environment was less of a challenge.

Pre-visits to school supported a positive transition. Of the 13 children the researchers followed through transition, six children had a pre-visit to the school they would attend; two of these were in the very positive transition group (one child in the very positive transition group visited a different school). These visits usually involved the EPF coordinator (through helping plan the visit), ECE centre and parent. However, the visits occurred at the end of the year before the child turned five, so the child did not always meet his/her class teacher. Three children made visits to schools that they subsequently did not attend, although the experience was regarded as positive in familiarising the child with what goes on at school. These were to schools near the ECE centre or where parents thought the child might go. Generally the coordinators regarded their role as supporting parents with information on how to enrol and what preparations would support the child and encouraged the parents themselves to make the pre-visits rather than going with them. Four children did not do pre-visits to any school. These families had identified the schools their children would attend and were largely encouraged by coordinators to enrol early and do pre-visits, however did not do as suggested, despite in a few instances the coordinator checking that this was done. As one parent said:

I enrolled her at the beginning; the first day she went to school; no visits; and they were all right;
I fill in the thing and I got all my papers done and she was in straight away. I didn’t stay [on the first day]; I came home.

In these instances, the ECE services did not arrange visits. One was a home-based provider who did not see school visits as their responsibility; another was Te Kura where the EPF coordinator was told the mother wanted to do the visit herself (but did not); the other two, education and care centres had very limited support for transition.

Around half the parents (5 of 13) stayed for least part of the time on the first day to support transition. Generally, parents were welcomed except in one instance as Rangi’s mum described:
I tried to stay the first day but more or less got the boot. With my other children, I stayed for the whole week and had lunch with them. It was annoying; it pissed me off. I thought how bloody rude. Well I said to her when the kids went into the class and stuff, I asked if it was all right if I stuck around for the day; and she turned around and said, “prefer you not”. I said, “Why is that?” and she goes “because the kids are actually good when the parents aren’t there; they will blend in fine” and things like that.

Rangi and his mum had not had any pre-visits to meet the teacher, but because she had previously stayed with Rangi’s older siblings until they settled she expected to be able to do this again. In this instance the EPF coordinator generally contacted mum by phone. As she said: “still check every week or two weeks, if not I see her up at the library or she rings me to see how baby is and how he’s getting on at school”. It may be that earlier and less casual intervention by the EPF coordinator would have supported a less fractious outcome.

It was helpful for children to have older siblings or relations attending the school. This gave them some familiarity with what school is like before they attended and seemed to help them have a sense of school being their place.

**Case study of factors contributing to a positive transition: Roimata**

Roimata has English as her second language. She has several siblings. The family moved to New Zealand from Tonga when she was three. While her parents speak both Tongan and English, Tongan was the home language and Roimata spoke no English on arriving in New Zealand. As part of the transition into a new language and culture, Roimata’s mother was keen for Roimata to develop her learning in the English language. In discussion with the EPF coordinator a decision was made that the family engage in the playgroup at the local church to support their learning in English.

**Learning Foundations**

Roimata is one of five children identified as having ‘strong learning foundations’ across strands of Te Whāriki except that indicators of ‘exploration’ were not evidenced strongly. Interestingly, when observations were conducted in the ECE environment, learning was largely instructional with children asked to complete the same task at the same time, perhaps reducing opportunities for exploration.

For Roimata the input of ECE, EPF and family each contributed to the strength of the various learning foundations she took with her into school. Roimata was described as having particularly strong learning foundations in: Wellbeing and the confidence to learn; and Communication, in particular familiarity and enjoyment with reading, writing and mathematics.

Wellbeing: the EPF coordinator in conjunction with the mother ensured the ECE environment was optimal for ensuring Roimata’s wellbeing and provided an environment where the sense of belonging provided a platform for her to develop confidence in speaking and understanding the English language. The EPF coordinator said, “That was my goal, seeing her confidence in the language”. The playgroup was located at the church the family attended so was familiar to Roimata and her mother was a helper at playgroup. After spending some time at the church playgroup, Roimata was enrolled at an education and care centre; however, she was very unsettled so the decision was made to return to the playgroup. As her mother said, “that’s her comfort”.

Communication: Roimata was described by all those interviewed as being very interested in the written word. This was encouraged by the EPF coordinator, by the playgroup coordinator and within her family. As her mother said:
Roimata really loves to read even though she doesn’t know how to read. She spends her time and she looks at the books … she tells her own story about the pictures.

This love of books was encouraged by the EPF coordinator who said, “Roimata she was always interested in books, that was her main interest, for me to see that I started providing more resources and tools”. The EPF coordinator also introduced the family to HIPPY which further enhanced the learning opportunities and engaged the family in the learning processes. At home, Roimata was regularly read to by both parents and older siblings and she in turn created games and stories with her younger sibling contributing to her younger sibling’s learning.

Playgroup provided the opportunities for Roimata to engage in activities that encouraged her interest in communicating; she was said to love painting and often “draw pictures and explain her story about the pictures”. Three days a week she attended the playgroup and a transition programme for the four year old children focusing on the alphabet, colours, shapes, and identifying the letters in their name. Before she started school Roimata had learnt to write her name.

**Transition into school**

While she had been to the school previously with older siblings and her ECE centre, Roimata had no opportunity to become familiar with her own classroom environment as her first visit was on the day she started when she was brought in by her mother. The new entrant teacher said, “I didn’t even know she was going to come”. The teacher who was Tongan herself, did note however that this was less of an issue than it might have been as she knew the family through the Tongan community and had taught one of Roimata’s older siblings; supporting continuity of information between family and school. She did however prefer that children visited her classroom prior to starting so that relationships could be established between her and the students.

I need to develop a warm relationship between me and the children because when they turn five and they come into here there won’t be any problem, socialisation, talking and playing with other kids in the playground and doing their work, following the instructions given and the listening skills.

Roimata’s mother said she was unable to visit the school as she had started work, so did not have the time free. She had expected the ECE would visit. One month before attending school Roimata had been moved from playgroup to a Pacific home-based ECE and school visits were not feasible for the educator who had other children. When asked whether EPF had a role in the transition process, Roimata’s mother said no. Roimata’s mother said that when she had asked at the school office, when taking Roimata’s siblings to school, the office ladies said, “that’s all right, just come with her”. So, Roimata was enrolled and started on the same day. Her mother said Roimata cried on the first day but by the second day could not wait to go to school.

Despite the abrupt start, Roimata’s transition to school was described as very positive by both her teacher and her mother in terms of her readiness to settle quickly into the new routines. Her teacher said while she was “a bit shy at the beginning”, she quickly gained confidence in her communication with both her teacher and the other students. As part of the learning induction, the teacher said the children learnt to speak confidently and clearly to the audience which was the class. After the first week, Roimata was said to be confident in expressing her views. Roimata’s mother commented that she quickly learnt to follow classroom routines and take responsibility for her own belongings. She said:

> When I drop her, after three days, I saw her she went straight to her classroom and put everything in tidy; open her bag, take off her book bag the Duffy one and put it to where they arrange to put it, take her lunch box and put it where her name is and she close it properly.
A key factor in ease of transitioning to school was Roimata’s strength in and familiarity with the Key Competency Using Language and Text. Her teacher attributed this to the preschool experience commenting that for her this meant that she could work on progressing Roimata’s learning rather than starting from basics.

Academically I can tell that she has been in the preschool because of the language. Although English is not her first language, but she was talking very well, very clearly and she did it confidently. When she first held the pencil I get to know that she has been in the preschool and she, the first thing I noticed when I gave her the pencil, the first thing that she did, she wrote her name … She could count up to twenty and backwards from ten right away. So there was no need for me to go over that, I actually could go forward.

Support from home was also a contributing factor in Roimata’s strength in the use of language and text as well as supporting her in relating well to others. Roimata’s mother talked about doing spelling homework every evening, and reading the books Roimata brought home with her, as well as Roimata ‘copying’ her older siblings when they read. Roimata’s mother also noted that while their personal expectations for Roimata were academic they had expectations around her behaviour which they went over each day.

We expect her to pass all the level in her class and not only that her behaviour too; we are telling her to calm and listen and obey.

Summary
Thirteen of the original 18 children were followed into school; four families moved out of the area, and one child remained in ECE. Children had a range of transition experiences. One group of four children experienced transition as very positive in the way they settled and their classroom work. One group of six children experienced reasonably smooth transitions but had some issues in classroom work. One group of three children did not settle quickly, displayed challenging behaviour and experienced challenges in classroom work.

The processes occurring that might be expected to support transition; school visits, health and Before School Checks, information sent to school, were highly variable, and were supported to different extents by the parents, EPF and ECE settings:

- Nine children had school visits before enrolment, organised by their ECE setting or in one instance the parent.

- Two of the four children who had no visits had relationships with other children attending or with their new entrant teacher.

- Health and Before School Checks were organised by the ECE setting for eight children and by Plunket for two children. ECE teachers did not know whether two of the remaining three children had these checks; one child had no checks.

- Some EPF coordinators played a role in supporting health checks, such as discussing these with the parent and arranging transport.

- Only five ECE centres or parents passed on children’s portfolios to schools.

- All ECE settings said they had some kind of transition programme, ranging from a focus on particular skills thought to assist transition, to development of a transition portfolio and regular visits to take part in the local school programme and library.
EPF coordinators generally saw their role as making sure the child was enrolled at a school, and encouraging a school visit, but most were not in direct contact with the school themselves. All but two EPF coordinators said they played an active role in discussing the enrolment process with parents and potential schools. In addition, some EPF coordinators gave more specific support, including checking that planned visits happened, giving advice on funding, supplying resources, directly talking to the school principal, and developing a transition plan in discussion with the parent. Some coordinators stayed in close contact with families after school enrolment, but feedback from families indicates that others were quite casual about an arrangement, leaving it up to parents to contact them.

Once in school, new entrant teachers emphasised children having strength on the Key Competencies of Managing Self, Using Languages Symbols and Texts and Relating to Others as supporting transition. Self-care was viewed as important. Strong learning foundations developed in the EPF and ECE settings by the child supported them in the early months of school. Children had more favourable transition experiences where new entrant teachers noticed, recognised and responded to children’s strengths and supported these in the classroom. Conversely, where patterns of strength seen and documented in ECE were not recognised in the new entrant classroom, children experienced challenges. Overall, an integrated approach to transition where parents, EPF, ECE and the school acted together to support the child’s transition to school seemed to be very beneficial. These findings highlight the importance of the major players in children’s lives working together with shared aims around transition.
5. Conclusion

This study has examined the learning foundations and transitions to school of children whose families participated in the Ministry of Education Engaging Priority Families initiative. Variable experiences emerged, which we examine in this conclusion, looking at the support from EPF and ECE that helped the child and family, and what additional support might have helped them.

Learning foundations

Participation in ECE made a difference for the children in this study. Throughout the evaluation EPF coordinators have been shown to have a powerful role in enabling participation. The main role was gaining parents’ trust and supporting the child’s enrolment and attendance in ECE; most families would not have enrolled their child without this support. EPF coordinators supported regular attendance in ECE, sometimes scaffolding help in getting the child attending and gradually withdrawing when the parent could get the child to ECE. Regularity of attendance was also supported by EPF coordinators through provision of transport. Literature on duration of ECE attendance suggests that more months in ECE are advantageous for cognitive outcomes and some learning dispositions outcomes, but effects are moderated by the quality of ECE. “Studies have found an interaction between effects of duration with quality: longer duration in good quality ECE centres is beneficial for learning dispositions, but longer duration was not beneficial in centres rated low-quality in terms of structural features (e.g. qualifications and ratios) and adult–child interactions and communication” (Mitchell, Wylie, & Carr, 2008, p. 49). In this stage of the study, regular attendance of between 18 and 30 hours per week for at least six months was associated with strong learning foundations and made possible through EPF coordination, although duration of attendance was not the only or main contributing factor (some children attended longer but had less rich opportunities for learning and development).

All children developed positive learning foundations across at least some of the strands of Te Whāriki while attending ECE; some more strongly and over wider domains than others.

Communication was emphasised as being of crucial importance by parents and teachers/educators, most particularly oral communication and good listening skills, and enjoyment of reading and writing, alongside basic skills of counting, identifying letters and writing one’s own name. All strands of Te Whāriki link to dispositions that are important for holistic learning and development, but some had lesser emphasis in interview and portfolio documentation for some children, and the strength of their learning foundations varied. Indicators of belonging; that children are engaged, focused and persisting when things are difficult or ‘mastery orientation’ (Dweck & Leggett, 1988) are described by Siraj-Blatchford (2004) as children tending, after a setback, to “focus on effort and strategies instead of worrying that they are incompetent” (p. 11); this supports lifelong learning.

Wellbeing was supported for most children, and four children accessed specialist support, one through Group Special Education and one for speech issues. But the need for hearing/vision/speech checks for three children was not recognised by the ECE setting or EPF coordinator for three children, despite concerns held by the mothers. Subsequently, checks done at school revealed that one of these children had hearing and vision issues. This delay in diagnosis may well have impeded these children’s learning and development.

Contribution (with an emphasis on strategies for relating with others and social skills) was able to be more readily emphasised in centre-based ECE services compared with homebased and Te Kura services. The study found a more limited focus on exploration and working theories, consistent with other evidence (Hedges & Jones, 2012;
Mitchell et al., 2015) that the concept of working theories has been less well developed by practitioners than learning dispositions.

The study found that educational activities parents did at home and their contribution to the ECE programme made a difference to children’s learning. These findings are consistent with the Effective Provision of Preschool Education study in the UK which found that the quality of the home learning environment (where parents engaged in educational activities, including, reading to children, teaching children songs and nursery rhymes, playing with letters and numbers, painting and drawing and taking children to libraries, creating regular opportunities for play with friends) strongly promoted children’s intellectual and social development (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). The EPF co-ordinator supported activities at home, usually through provision of resources and ideas. Some co-ordinators focused on writing and naming activities, e.g. tracing around a stencil; others conveyed a broader view of learning such as encouraging reading for meaning and enjoyment, and lots of talking. Artefacts brought home from ECE or activities observed there or conveyed through the EPF co-ordinator generated ideas for activities parents could do at home. Children themselves played a role in initiating home activities through acting out what they had liked doing at ECE. In conjunction with the literature, these findings suggest the powerful role early childhood services and EPF co-ordinators play in collaborating with families in order to meet educational aims. And it is important to children that people whose opinion and love they value also value and support their learning. These findings suggest a depth of understanding about teaching and learning is a valuable attribute for co-ordinators and teachers/educators working with families so that their suggestions and guidance are most fitting.

However, the teaching and learning approaches of teachers/educators were variable. The longitudinal Effective Provision of Preschool Education research (Siraj-Blatchford, 2004) has shown that when preschool settings are assessed as highly effective, they can help reduce inequalities associated with socioeconomic disadvantage and support school transitions. In our small sample, the importance of pedagogical approaches was very evident. The early childhood services that contributed to positive child and family outcomes were generally characterised by teachers/educators who recognised possibilities for extending individual children’s learning and development, and intentionally scaffolded learning. They worked from a strengths based approach. We could see this approach documented in assessments where the teacher/educators’ focus on valued outcomes for each individual child were evident. The portfolio, even over only a short period of time, showed a breadth and depth of learning across the strands of Te Whāriki. Family engagement and contribution were documented too and given recognition and value. In settings where slower changes were evidenced, there were skimpy portfolios and the focus was generally narrowly confined to short learning episodes about skills and group stories. In addition, some of these teachers, in interviews, were not able to explain in any but general terms how the ECE setting supported learning, even when probed. Further researchers when observing in these ECE environments noted that interactions were generally confined to group level instructions with minimal interaction with target children. In one instance the target child spent a whole morning being moved, as part of a group, from group activity to group activity without any teacher interacting with him. In another setting a teacher was observed shouting at a child who was crying because the mum had left. Some children in these settings had insufficient attention paid to health issues. Priority children need access to excellent ECE settings.

What additional support might have helped these children?
First, a longer duration in ECE (over six months) was associated with more positive learning foundations across the strands of Te Whāriki. Some children were not enrolled in EPF until they were nearly school age; had they come into the EPF programme at a younger age they would most likely have started ECE sooner.

Secondly, a breadth and depth of teaching and learning and documented assessment was associated with children developing stronger learning foundations. Not all children experienced rich learning opportunities across all the
strands of Te Whāriki. This suggests the EPF brokering role needs to extend to an evaluation of the quality of ECE services as well as suitability in terms of structural features and cultural compatibility if educational inequalities are to be addressed. However, EPF coordinators and families may be constrained by the choice of ECE services on offer in a particular community including the range of quality, signalling that the need to ensure high quality provision is a policy issue that extends beyond this evaluation.

Thirdly, while some children were referred to specialists for health and special education support; three children appeared to have issues that were not identified by ECE teachers or EPF coordinators. More could have been done by the EPF coordinator and ECE setting in ‘noticing, recognising and responding’ to child behaviour thus ensuring appropriate and timely checks for these children. Teachers/educators and EPF coordinators need to assess the need for referrals and to ensure access to services and support is readily available.

Transition to school

EPF coordinators’ role in transition was most commonly in the background working with parents to make sure they made a decision about which school their child might attend, how to go about enrolling the child, and encouraging parents to take their child on school visits before actual attendance. Most coordinators followed up to check that visits had occurred, either with ECE services or parents; just one EPF coordinator went on a school visit with a child. When parents visited schools with the children before enrolment, they sometimes did not meet the new entrant teacher who would teach their child; rather the “office lady” or principal. Two parents were deterred from either visiting the classroom pre-enrolment or staying with their child.

Both EPF coordinators and ECE settings played a strong role in enhancing children’s learning dispositions and skills in preparation for starting school; EPF coordinators through supporting parents with ideas and resources for activities at home. Some ECE services had transition programmes that included special transition groups for older children and taking children on pre-visits to school. Where children attended a number of different schools in the community, pre-visits to a local school with all children helped children understand what happens at school. This is a similar finding to findings from research at Mangere Bridge Kindergarten (Hartley, Rogers, Smith, Peters, & Carr, 2012) that parents reported such an experience is “a useful experience to orient their children’s (and their own) thinking when talking about what happens at school” (p. 40). It helped children to have peers and family attend the same school, and for the teacher to know the family, a finding consistent with the Learning journeys from early childhood into school study discussed by Vanessa Paki in interview with Boyd (2014), Ka Hikitia (Ministry of Education, 2013a) and the Pasifika Education Plan (Ministry of Education, 2013b). These processes and relationships helped the child feel comfortable and at home in the school setting.

Only five of the ECE services in this study said they passed on or discussed written assessment information to the schools that the case study children attended; however this information did not get to the child’s teacher if they started school the following year. There were few reported occasions for ECE and new entrant teachers who were serving a local community to share pedagogical knowledge and knowledge of specific children.

Once the child was at school, there were no direct connections between the school and EPF or ECE for the children in our study, although the EPF coordinator kept in contact with the family to varying degrees. These missed opportunities weakened possibilities for collaboration and to work in partnership. Crossing the border (Hartley et al., 2012) and the special issue of Early Childhood Folio (Vol 18, No 2, 2014) sharing some of the work of an international research collaboration focused on Pedagogies of Educational Transitions, have highlighted productive and practical ways in which coherency and continuity in children’s experiences can be supported.
Children experienced transition to school in a range of ways, from very positive to somewhat challenging. When transition worked well for the child, there were culturally compatible cross links from the school with the child’s home language and culture (Royal Tangaere, 1996) and new entrant teachers noticed and picked up on the range of competencies demonstrated within the ECE setting. Ecological theory, discussed in Chapter 2, offers an explanation of why such continuity and interrelationships between settings of home, ECE and school are valuable for supporting coherence in children’s lives and positive transitions. Some parents and new entrant teachers reported on the practice of assessing children immediately on their entry to school in literacy and numeracy; an unfamiliar practice for children that sometimes did not always pick up what children could do in the areas assessed and at times underestimated other competencies displayed in the ECE setting.

What additional support might have helped these children?
Familiarity with school, through for example targeted visits from ECE and/or with parents and/or the EPF coordinator to the school the child will attend and general school visits to find out about school, are supportive of children feeling comfortable in a school setting. This requires all parties to recognise the value of experience within a classroom and in meeting a new entrant teacher before coming to school, and to work together to enable this to happen. EPF coordinators could play a more direct role in supporting school visits by checking to ensure these have happened or going with the parent and child on visits. Support staff in schools who may respond to parents on the first contact and on enrolment are well placed to be partners in working out how to support such connections within their school.

Secondly, the sharing of assessment information between ECE teachers/educators and new entrant teachers; and greater coherence between ECE settings and school, needs to be prioritised. To improve transition processes it could be beneficial to enable and provide support for opportunities for teachers in each sector to work together at a community level; with the EPF coordinator playing a brokering role in ensuring information is passed to new entrant teachers and further supporting families over the transition by maintaining regular contact focused on assessing need and supporting the child as required.
References


Appendix 1: Portfolio analysis to provide supporting evidence for learning outcomes

Portfolio analysis for Engaging Priority Family children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child:</th>
<th>Researcher:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood service:</td>
<td>Date:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provider Code:</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The observations of the child and teacher comments

Do items in the portfolio show and/or comment on:

Curriculum: connections with the national early childhood curriculum

Check one or both in each group:

**Belonging [Te Whāriki, page 4]**

- The child is engaged and focused; persevering with a task even when it’s difficult.
- A comment that makes links to the wider community—home and/or other places.

Example/s:

**Well-being [Te Whāriki, page 54]**

- Knowledge skills and attitudes to do with keeping healthy and safe from harm.
- Determining their own actions and making their own choices.

Example/s:

**Exploration [Te Whāriki, page 82]**

- Enthusiasm and/or strategies for exploring the local environment and/or the world actively with all the senses.
- The child is developing (and perhaps talking about) ‘working theories’ (tentative knowledge) about science, maths, or the social world.
Example/s:

**Communication [Te Whāriki, page 72]**

- Non-verbal and verbal communication skills and inclinations, emerging and/or becoming more complex
- Enjoying being creative or expressive (pretend play, carpentry, art, music, story-telling …); developing interest and/or competence in these domains

Example/s:

**Contribution [Te Whāriki, page 64]**

- Respect for others; taking responsibility.
- Working/playing collaboratively with others; strategies for relating to others.

Example/s:

**Ngā hononga ke te tauparapara: Ways of knowing [Te Whatu Pōkeka, 2009]**

- The child practising tikanga Māori? (Tikanga whakaaro)

Example/s:

- The child using te reo Māori in the centre?
- The child using home languages in the centre.

**Family/whānau voice**

Are there any contributions from family/whānau?

- Yes  
- No

If yes, describe the contributions

**Child contributions**

Are there any contributions that are co-constructed by the child?

- Yes  
- No

If yes, describe the contributions

Thank you very much for your help