

Centre of innovation Research

Research Report for the Ministry of Education

An exploration of the practices and systems that foster a sense of wellbeing and belonging for young children and their families as they transition from home to a ‘formal’ home-based care and education

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Executive Summary

This report describes the Centre of Innovation (COI) action research project carried out by Hutt Family Day Care (HFDC) in Lower Hutt, Wellington from January 2006 to end of 2007. Hutt Family Day Care is a privately owned home-based network established in 1999. It comprises eighteen educators working from their homes which are located between Petone and Upper Hutt. Educators provide care and education services for 55 children. Two full time co-ordinators and one who is part-time support the network.

The project aims to fill a gap in the literature in regard to the nature of the transitions that occur for young children and their family as they move from home to early childhood service, in this instance to a home-based context. It is grounded in the view that transitions are dynamic and ongoing and are experienced by everyone involved in the home-based education and care arrangement. This includes the child, the parent(s), the educator, the educators' family, other children at the educators' home and the co-ordinators. Parents and children are learning about the people and things in the educator's home and everyone there is learning about the new family and making adjustments as they do so. The project also presupposed that the relationship building that happens during transitions between home and the service sets the scene for facilitating the child's trust in his or her educator as well as developing the child's sense of identity in the new place.

To capture the nature of the home-based transition the study is located within the 'matching' process, across multiple sites (educator homes) and the first six weeks of a child settling into HFDC. It is a descriptive and exploratory study that has employed mixed methods of data collection and analysis –both quantitative and qualitative. The aim of the study is to expand theory and practice knowledge in relation to home-based transitions using survey, interview, focus group and case study methods within an action research approach. The qualitative aspects of the study are the result of a desire to observe naturally occurring activities and practices in context (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

The question was reframed following the data collection phase of the study which ceased part way through. This was the result of careful analysis of the collected data and identification of possibilities for utilising the incomplete data set in a way which would ensure valid and reliable results for the project. The reshaped question was intended to allow broad and rich description of how participants experience the systems and practices which underpin 'transition' into a home-based setting.

The question being explored in this report is:

What is the nature of the practices and systems that foster a sense of wellbeing and belonging for young children and their families as they transition from home to 'formal' home-based care and education settings?

The literature review which was completed by the author as part of this project suggests that ‘transition’ is a theoretically complex field of study that has largely been studied through the lens of the ecological model of child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1997). In the view of Kay Margetts (in Dunlop and Fabian, 2007) the ecological approach provides a comprehensive framework for exploring the complexity of the transition process through its focus on interaction, interrelatedness and human agency. This approach has informed analysis and is congruent with the theoretical concepts/ constructs that were being conceived during data collection.

This report explores the nature of these interactions and relationships within a framework of systems and processes which underpin transitions for new families entering HFDC. Its conceptual framework is based on Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory of learning and development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Bronfenbrenner proposed that contexts or settings influence development at different levels. He emphasized in particular the importance of the relationships between these settings including the relationships between the individual and the settings in which they operate. Use of this theoretical framework acknowledges the contextualised nature of learning and development for young children, parents, teachers, whanau and communities (see the principles of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996)). It helped the researchers recognise how complex home based networks are.

At the level of the microsystem home-based transitions are viewed as being influenced by the interactions that occur between the new family and the home-based service. The next level, or mesosystem, relates to connections between these settings and the broader community within which the home-based care occurs. At the macrosystem it relates to the sub culture of dominant beliefs and ideologies of the society in which the family child lives; that is, the connections with society, sectors and the broader community.

Because of a Budget decision, the COI programme ended on 30 June 2009. Only a ‘light’ analysis of results was possible within the tightened timeframe for completing the review. Key themes resulting from this work and which are supported by the research literature on this topic are that:

- Respectful relationships, within which time is taken for parents and educators to get to know each other and share information, help facilitate the seamless transition of young children from home to home-based care and education settings,
- Trusting relationships sit at the core of effective transition processes for young children and their families,
- Parents are an integral part of the transition process. In home-based care it is important to focus equally on the transition of both parents and children.

- Continuity and linkages between home and home-based settings are important. While ‘continuity’ is an elusive concept in the research literature which requires further exploration, the evidence from the study suggests that the ‘matching’ process implemented by Hutt Family Day Care and the oversight provided by co-ordinators are important factors in ensuring continuity for children and their parents as they move from their home to home-based educator’s setting.
- The entry of new families to a home-based setting involves a community of participants, all of whom have a direct link to that setting and educator. Because of the small group size of participating children (4 at any one time) the entry of a new family has an influence on all those connected to the setting, both adults and children. Systems and processes therefore need to comprehensively accommodate all parties to the arrangement.
- Transition in home-based care is potentially across multiple sites. While the initial focus is on entry to the home-based setting, attention also needs to be paid to strategies which foster the wellbeing of children as they navigate multiple sites of education and care during a week, with their educator and other children; for example, attendance at network playgroups or playcentre.

This report focuses on articulating key findings from the project in relation to systems and processes which are likely to promote the wellbeing of young children as they transition from home to home-based service. To comment on the experience and new understandings gained by educators and parents as a result of participating in this project would be beyond the scope of this brief and the knowledge of the writer.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

An exploration of the practices and systems that foster a sense of wellbeing and belonging for young children and their families as they transition from home to ‘formal’ home-based care and education settings.

Introduction

Hutt Family Day Care (established in 1999) is a small independent home-based service operating solely in the Hutt Valley. It comprises eighteen educators working from their homes which are located between Petone and Upper Hutt. Educators provide care and education services for 55 children. Two full time co-ordinators and one who is part-time support the network.

Home-based services are where care and education is provided in the home. Under New Zealand regulations, this can be either the home of the adult providing the care and education (commonly referred to as family day care) or in the child’s home (a ‘nanny’ service). This study focuses on family day care. The adults providing care and education are known as educators. Educators, who are not required to have a recognised early childhood qualification, are supported in their work by early childhood qualified co-ordinators. The Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008 allow a co-ordinator to support up to 80 children within a network. Educators are permitted to have up to 4 children attend at anyone time. Home-based services are expected to meet equivalent quality standards to those prescribed by the Government for early childhood centres and are also subject to 3 yearly reviews by the Education Review Office (ERO). *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum framework (Ministry of Education, 1996) guides the programme. It has an ecological framework, drawing on Bronfenbrenner’s theory (1979) of the ecology of human development.

Multiple curriculum sites are a special and significant feature of the home-based care and education provided for young children. This means that although the educator’s home acts as the base location, other sites within the community are easily accessed on a daily basis. It is possible, therefore, to provide a range of rich, varied and stimulating experiences for children, both group and individual, within the local community context. These opportunities may include attendance at network and other playgroups, visits to other early childhood services such as kindergarten and playcentre, and access to local facilities such as libraries, parks and shops. The presence of one constant adult and a small group of children enable spontaneous and relevant outings which respond to children’s interests in an unconstructed way to occur. A strength of home-based services, is their authentic connection to the local communities which young children inhabit.

Hutt Family Day Care educators work for varying hours. Children attend for their enrolled hours but there is no overall pattern of attendance. The earliest a child arrived during the project was 6.30am and the latest a child left was 6pm. A co-ordinator is available by phone for all hours that a child is in care. Co-ordinators provide ongoing professional support, professional development and guidance for educators. They see all educators and children on a weekly basis at the network's playgroup at Normandale Playcentre and visit each educator's home while children are attending on a fortnightly basis.

Background to the Research

The Centres of Innovation (COI) research initiative was first signalled under the "improving quality" goal of *Pathways to the Future: Nga Huarahi Arataki*, the early childhood strategic plan (Ministry of Education, 2002). In Centre for Innovation projects, innovative early childhood centres (*services*) are charged with reflecting on and investigating their practices through action research and for sharing their findings with the broader education community (Ministry of Education, 2009)

In the first round of COI's in 2002, home-based services were ineligible to apply. The exclusion of home-based services from the initiative due to its limitation to 'centres' was concerning for the sector. Hutt Family Day Care was successful with its 2004 application and by the end of the COI Programme was the only home-based service to have participated in it. Despite the success of the Hutt Family Day Care proposal, the Centre for Innovation programme continues to be publicly associated with centre-based rather than home-based provision.

Part way through the project, in 2008, there was a change of researchers. This resulted in a review of project scope. Data collection was discontinued and an analysis of collected data undertaken to ascertain future directions for the project, if any. It was concluded that the data that had been collected (although incomplete) should be analysed but that modification of the original research intent and question would be necessary. The stock-take and assessment of data suggested that a wealth of data had been collected within a short timeframe and that with a slight refocusing of the original research question the findings would have the potential to inform broader understandings of both 'early childhood transitions' and practice both within and beyond the early childhood sector.

Research Aims and Question

This research explores the transition that occurs for young children and their families when a young child enters a home-based care and education service. Transition is a broad term used to describe a process of moving from one setting or activity to another and a change of context which is often accompanied by a move from one phase of education to another (Dunlop & Fabian, 2007).

For this study HFDC takes the view that transitions are being made by everyone involved in the care arrangement – children, their families, educators and co-ordinators. The innovative practice being explored is the 'matching process' that occurs at the time of a new child's entry to the home-based network. At this time an

intricate interplay of relationships occurs. These are mainly between (but not restricted to): coordinator/educator; coordinator/parent; coordinator/children; educator/parent; educator/ children; parent/ child; and child/ child. How these transitions are achieved, the effectiveness of the ‘matching’ process and their effect on children’s wellbeing is central to the research proposal. The relationship between the educators’ own family and other members of the care network are also considered.

As active participants in the process of transition adults and children are continually constructing and reconstructing relationships, and responding creatively and dynamically in the care and education situation. It is important for there to be understanding of the contexts which have shaped children for the new experience, how children and adults are likely to interpret, interact and settle in the new environment and for there to be a process which supports the new comer to become competent in the new context/ culture.

Every effort is made to ensure that the new directions taken midway for this project align with those already taken. This is to ensure the coherence of the overall project to date, the contribution of the individuals who have been involved and the congruence/alignment of the data collection and analysis phases.

The original project proposal sought to answer the question: “*What beliefs, practices and systems contribute to positive transition processes?*” Because data collection ceased partway through the project the incomplete data set being worked with has limited the ability of the project to explore fully the research question as originally intended. As a result the research question and approach were reframed so as to maximise the potential for new insights and understandings in respect to the transition process to emerge from the existing data. With this in mind the guiding research question was reworded to:

What is the nature of the practices and systems that foster a sense of wellbeing and belonging for young children and their families as they transition from home to ‘formal’ home-based care and education settings?

The question was reduced in scope in two ways. First, it was recommended that the research should no longer have an overt focus on children’s learning. A ‘light’ analysis of collected data indicated that the project could provide significant insights into how parents, educators and co-ordinators experience the ‘transition’ process but that it was less robust in regard to ‘children’s voices’ and, therefore, only limited understandings could be drawn on the influence of Hutt Family Day Care transition practices and systems on children’s learning.

Second, the original proposal included a requirement to specifically explore the beliefs held by participants (children, parents, educators, coordinators) in regard to the home to home-based care and education transition. Because the area of ‘beliefs’ is complex, and underpinned by a substantial literature base of its own it was considered unlikely that the collected data on beliefs would be extensive enough to allow meaningful exploration of this area. As an alternative it is proposed that any comment made in relation to participant ‘beliefs’ is allowed to emerge from the data rather than

being made to 'fit' a predetermined question. On this basis 'beliefs' are no longer a specific focus of the research.

In changing the research question the need for the research question to align with the overarching objectives of the Centre of Innovation initiative was important. The 3 key objectives are:

- providing effective approaches to improve learning and teaching, based on *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2006);
- carrying out action research to explore the effects of innovative approaches to learning and teaching and to develop resources to share with the early childhood sector; and
- to share knowledge and understanding and models of good practice with colleagues and parents via a dissemination plan.

The pared back focus of the project, without overt focus on children's perspectives or adult beliefs, is unlikely to change the original intent or positioning of the project in regard to these objectives. Despite the changed focus it continues to sit well within the socio-cultural framework of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2006) and its principles and strands, and offers new insights in the largely under researched areas of home-based care and education and transitions within the early childhood sector. The researchers can see the potential for resource development from the project to inform and enhance sector wide practice in both home and centre-based services.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Consideration of research context and theoretical approaches to the study of early childhood transition

Introduction

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests that the transition from home to school for most young children is the first and major ecological transition in their education life. It is claimed also that the changes that occur through life are influenced by children's experience of the first transition (Fabian & Dunlop, 2002; Fthenakis, 1998; Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000).

In the 21st century this is particularly significant as young children are living in a world where they are likely to enter institutionalised care at an earlier age and for an increasingly extended period of their lives (Fabian & Dunlop, 2002). For some children this may include entering a number of different early childhood services (cultural settings) during their young life which can include going to sessional kindergarten, a full-day childcare centre, family day care service, or nanny service to name a few. As well it is likely that the culture and structures within many of these settings will differ with some children commuting between multiple early childhood settings and home during the course of a week. For these reasons it is essential to gain more understanding of what this may mean for families and children, as 'others', including the State, pick up a bigger role in raising the nation's children. Given that each of these experiences is likely to affect the wellbeing of children and their capacity to adjust and learn, it is important to pay close attention to young children's early experience in order to provide well for them (Fabian & Dunlop, 2002).

While there is a significant base of international literature which focuses on 'transitions' and associated concepts of continuity, progression and 'settling' processes, it tends to focus mainly on the transition of children to school, and is comparatively silent on the transitions which occur for young children prior to them hitting this major milestone in their lives. Notable exceptions include two Aotearoa/New Zealand studies undertaken in early childhood centres by Dalli (2000), where she explores the process of settling five children under three years old in an early childhood setting, and Merry's study (2004) of young children's transitions between groups within a mixed age centre. Dalli notes also that a shortcoming of the international literature related to transitions is that most research relating to adults has focussed on mothers as informants (rather than direct participants) and has largely neglected the teacher.

The home-based context

The specifically targeted 'transition' literature is particularly silent on young children's transition from home to home-based care setting where this transition often

happens at a very young age. Home-based care, both formal and informal is also a widely used care and education option for working parents of young children. Data provided by the National Research Bureau (1993), in what is still the most recent and accessible national survey of the use made by parents of early childhood care options, indicate that home-based services are likely to be the main services used by working parents in Aotearoa/ New Zealand and that children are likely to spend longer hours in home-based care (Everiss, 1998). Other studies suggest that parents who choose home-based care for their children do so because it is flexible and more home-like and that the younger the child the more likely it is that they will be placed in a home-based care option (e.g., Everiss, 1998; Kontos, 1992; Rapp & Lloyd, 1989; Seo, 2003).

While this survey is 15 years old it is likely that the same pattern applies today, given the growth that has occurred during this period in Ministry of Education recognised home-based provision¹ and the continuing lack of attention that is given to informal home-based early childhood provision. Ministry of Education data for the last 4 years shows that there has been significant growth in home-based provision in New Zealand with a 31.7% increase in enrolments (from 9,922 enrolments at 1 July 2004 to 13,065 at 1 July 2008). During the same period there has been an overall enrolment growth rate of 8.5% for licensed and chartered services (Ministry of Education, 2009). Despite the comparatively high increase in demand for home-based services little attention continues to be given to policy for this sub-sector in comparison to that for early childhood centres.

What is transition?

The concept of transition has been defined in different ways by scholars (Lam & Pollard, 2006). Dunlop and Fabian (2007) suggest though that it is generally understood in educational terms as a change of context which involves a process of moving from one setting or activity to another, and is often associated with a move from one phase of education to another. A number of interchangeable terms are used to describe this process. Although not an exhaustive list the following terms seem to appear most frequently in the literature: transition; settling; separation; adaptation; adjustment; and coping with change/ change process (eg., Brostrom, 2002; Corsaro, Molinari & Rosier Brown, 2002; Dalli, 2000; Lam & Pollard, 2006; Peters, 2003). For the purposes of this project and for the sake of consistent understandings through the text the term 'transition' is used in an overarching way, with specific explanations provided, as appropriate.

Kagan (2003, cited in Lam & Pollard, 2006) considers there are two types of transition situation and uses the following terms to differentiate between them: horizontal and vertical. There appears to be general agreement between writers that horizontal transition is the movement across settings which occurs during the day and is where children move between formal and informal situations and different cultures. This necessitates children having to interpret their surroundings and 'read' what is required of them in each setting. Johansson (2007) notes also that it is likely that children meet at least two cultural systems beside their informal social network (home

¹ Ministry of Education statistics are available on <http://educationcounts.govt.nz>

and friends) during an ordinary day. Vertical transitions on the other-hand are seen as those which are characterised by a major change to everyday routine, most frequently the transition to school. (Brostrom, 2002; Dockett & Perry, 2001; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Kagan, 2003; Johansson, 2007; Peters, 2000). It is vertical transitions which are most often the focus of study.

Transition is viewed also as a change (transformative) process where participants shift from one constructed identity to another and which is likely to involve a change of culture or status (Van Gennep, 1960 cited in Lam & Pollard, 2006). This process is generally thought to be complex involving intertwined relationships and intensified, accelerated and socially regulated demands for children as they move between contexts and expectations. Adjustment depends on how firmly established children are as a member of the group (Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Fabian & Dunlop, 2002; Griebel & Niesel, 1997, 2002; Lam & Pollard, 2006). Transition is not deemed complete until the child once again experiences a sense of 'well-being' for, in reality, they leave a comfortable place to encounter many unknowns: new people, places, roles, rules, identity and things (Fthenakis, 1998).

Dunlop and Fabian (2007) suggest that transitions should be seen as a positive time of new discovery and transformation but that almost inevitably the rhetoric around them focuses instead on assumed problems. These include: issues of continuity; whether and when children make progress; coping with change; resilience; the absorption of changing expectations and new conformities; adaptation; and whether children are ready for what the transition may bring. In their view it is time to contest whether transition is merely a time of change or if in fact they are a time of change that bring shifts in culture, identity, role and status, as well as daily experience. If the latter is the case, they believe that transitions have the capacity to transform both positively and negatively, and further, if they are not always positive or are even a little too challenging for any child they need to be rethought and transformed.

Theoretical approaches

Transition is a theoretically complex field of theory and research with researchers, overtime, having sought to develop conceptual models aimed at facilitating common understandings and more effective transition practices (Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Lamb & Pollard, 2006; White & Sharp, 2007). This has resulted in growing recognition of the importance of context and processual aspects of transition (Corsaro *et al.*, 2002). Ecological models which draw on Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of child development and which broadly focus on transition as a change of contexts predominate in the literature (eg. Brostrom, 2002; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Dockett & Perry, 2001; Fabian & Dunlop, 2002; Griebel & Niesel, 1997, 2002; Johansson, 2007; Peters, 2000).

Dominance of Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory of the ecology of human development

The popular ecological model of child development is described by Kay Margett's (in Dunlop and Fabian, 2007) as providing a comprehensive framework for exploring the complexity of the transition process. She suggests that in this model the variability in children's development and adjustment to school is influenced by a number of

interdependent factors, including biological and developmental characteristics and social and cultural factors. At the level of the microsystem this development is influenced by the interactions of the child's personal characteristics with the settings that form the basis of their daily life – home, family, school, pre-school and local community. The next level or exosystem, indirectly influences children's development and includes parental employment, socio-economic status and a range of government policies and practices. More broadly, the components of the macrosystem shape children's development through the sub culture of dominant beliefs and ideologies of the society in which the child lives (Margetts in Dunlop & Fabian, 2007).

A number of researchers, however, consider that the ecological model lacks any direct consideration of the collective processes which constitute transitions or the power relations and social policies that produce and reproduce the very social contexts they identify. They consider also that although some of this work includes minority children, children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and children with disabilities, the lack of a comparative perspective (either across sub cultural groups or societies) works against consideration of the importance of power relations on policy formulation that affects children's transitions (eg. Corsaro *et al.*, 2002).

Broadening theoretical approaches

In response to criticism of the ecological approach, research such as the work of Rimm-Kauffman and Pianta (2000) gives growing recognition to the importance of context and the processual aspects of transitions. The authors challenge standard ecological approaches to transition by presenting an ecological and dynamic effects model where they identify some of the limitations of ecological models that focus only on the static nature of relationships among contexts. In this model they posit that: transition to school takes place in an environment defined by many changing interactions among child, school, classroom and community factors; child characteristics and context interact through a transactional process; and these interactions, over time, form patterns and relationships that can be described not only as influences on children's development, but also as outcomes in their own right (Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000).

Researchers to more recently extend on the ecological model include Lam & Pollard (2006) and Dunlop and Fabian (2007). Lam and Pollard in their conceptual framework for understanding children as agents in the transition from home to kindergarten highlight the relations between layers of context, stages of transition and adaptation outcomes. Alongside ecological theory they draw heavily on the work of Arnold van Gennep (1873- 1957). Van Gennep's work is relevant to the concept of transition because of its exploration of rituals and ceremonies which mark significant transitions to a new social status of individual within a lifecycle such as birth to childhood and childhood to adulthood. The rituals and ceremonies were considered essential by van Gennep to enable the individual to change positions.

In the knowledge that children are active and cultural learners Lam and Pollard's framework also draws on socio-cultural theory and the work of Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) and his colleagues Leont'ev and Luria where children are understood as active and social learners who acquire socially constructed concepts, language and

patterns of action through mediated processes which occur when interacting with cultural tools (mediational means) embedded within the socio-cultural context (Wertsch,1991). Thus their mediated actions are understood as situational and temporal, and may be different in context and over time (Rogoff,1996).

Similarly, Dunlop and Fabian (2007), while grounding their work in that of Bronfenbrenner take account of the work of Elder and Bourdieu, and through this create a discourse of transitions which highlights their complexity through showing that they evolve over time and are dynamic because of the interrelationships that exist between each of the players and the cultures and environments in which they sit. In Elder's life course theory (Elder, 1998), four defining principles emerge and serve to link parents, teachers, children's life course as each impacts on the other. These four principles are stated as historical time, timing in lives, linked lives and human agency. Elder's concept of historical time, where human beings are not just products but are producers sits well with Bronfenbrenner's view of interrelatedness and interaction and with Bourdieu's view of habitus which is made up of a person's individual history and the whole collective history of family and class that the individual is a member of (Reay,2004). When individual habitus or disposition encounters a field with which it is not familiar, change and transformation is likely to occur. All three theorists consider human agency as critical. The interweaving of interaction, change and time recognises the overlapping layers of children's experience, and the possibility of a dynamic interrelationship between home, early childhood setting(s) and school (Dunlop & Fabian, 2007).

The growing recognition of the complexity of 'transition' and that children's worlds change as children develop is important. However, researchers such as Corsaro *et al.*, (2002) suggest that models which recognise the importance of time and interactions among contexts still fall short where they assume that human development (here in relation to transition) is an individual process that can ultimately be captured, explained, and tested by some complex variable analysis based on differing characteristics of individual children and arrangements and variations of contexts. These researchers take the view that the development of humans is always collective and that transitions are always collectively produced and shared with significant others. Further, cultural contexts are collectively produced at the intercultural, community and societal level through productive-reproductive processes.

Taking a collective approach – Corsaro's theory of interpretive reproduction

Corsaro *et al.*, (2002) offer a theoretical approach to child socialisation (transition) known as interpretive reproduction which stresses both the innovative and creative aspects of children's participation in society and the fact that children both contribute to and are affected by processes of social reproduction. Their theoretical position is bedded within the broader literature that questions individualistic approaches to child development (eg, Bruner, 1986; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1996; Wertsch, 1998) and seeks to refine and extend the views of Vygotsky in socio-cultural theory, including the importance of socio-economic and power relations which are key to understanding interpretive reproduction yet, in their view, are often neglected in the research.

The longitudinal, ethno-historical multilevel and comparative ethnographies of the type used in the interpretive narrative case studies of Corsaro *et al.*, (2002) situate the changes in children's lives when transitioning to school in their participation in a complex web of collective experiences at the individual, interpersonal and cultural (or societal) planes of analysis. In this study Corsaro, Molinari and Rosier Brown carried out observations of 4-5 year old children over a 9 month period in two classrooms in two countries – the United States and Italy. They joined these children as they transitioned and interviewed parents and teachers. This approach has allowed the researchers to collect rich and detailed data which shows the overall complexity of these collective experiences with a shifting focus on the individual, interpersonal and cultural (or community) planes of analysis, including the enabling and constraining nature of power relations at the macro level in relation to broader government policies, the power of collective action at the interpersonal level which was especially evident in the constructed play situations of the children, and the uniqueness of individual personalities in early life transitions.

Collective themes running through the literature

The importance of continuity – a problematic concept

Continuity is a theme that occurs throughout Western transition literature as a key component of 'quality' care. However, Rosenthal (2000) considers it to be a taken for granted term that raises many questions for which there are no simple or consistent answers such as: what do we mean by continuity? How likely is it to find continuity between home and childcare? What happens when there is no continuity between settings? Is there a minimal level of continuity? And if so, how could it be achieved? She suggests also that the term 'continuity' has several meanings linked to 'congruence' and the nature of linkages between the home and early childhood setting. She links 'congruence' to similarity in child-rearing goals and in the nature of adult: child interactions and the term 'linkage' to the structural nature of the relationship between the childcare service and the family. Corsaro *et al.*, (2002) emphasise the need to keep exploring the 'continuity' aspect of 'transition' and how to ensure continuity for children in these early life transitions by trying to find answers to questions such as those posed by Rosenthal, on the premise that if we improve children's lives in the present we in turn enrich their own and our own futures.

In the interpretive reproduction approach Corsaro *et al.*, (2002) introduce the notion of priming events. Priming events involve activities, in which children by their very participation, attend prospectively to ongoing or anticipated changes in their lives. These can include such things as visits, the utilisation of siblings to support the change, familiarity with and coherence of expectations across settings. These events can start before the child enters a new setting with discussion, preparation and planning by all parties to the transition – parent, teacher and child. The induction period usually begins with the first pre-visit, and constitutes all the experiences and activities that children may meet during the initial stages of transition, including all the conditions and processes by which individuals gain direction and encouragement through increased understanding (Dunlop & Fabian, 2007).

While strategies such as the ones noted above are integral to facilitating a successful transition for children it is important to keep in mind that, they may also foster anxiety which can work against successful transition. Evidence arising from the research into transition to school suggests that children do have specific concerns about moving to a new setting and that although the majority of children feel positive about the transition to school, some have concerns about making friends, understanding rules and routines and the balance between work and play (Corsaro *et al.*, 2002; Griebel & Niesel, 2002; Einarsdottir, 2003; White & Sharp, 2007). Furthermore research evidence suggests that often there is a lack of communication between teachers which can hamper a school's ability to address children's individual learning needs (Brostrom, 2002).

Dalli (2002) in her research on the settling process for under three year old children in an early childhood setting notes that it is not only children but also parents who feel anxiety around the settling process. The four major themes that emerged from mothers' stories were: am I doing the right thing? – doubts, concerns and fears; seeking trust in the teacher; working out the rules of the game; and being there for the child. This period emerges for mothers as a time of deep emotions, where positive feelings about potential benefits to their child had to be balanced against the less desirable feelings of guilt, apprehension and ambivalence about whether they were doing the right thing.

Where there is a dissonance between the culture of the child and the setting it is likely that problems will occur. As Delpit (1992 cited in Corsaro *et al.*, 2002) argues, such cultural differences lead to a misreading of students aptitudes and abilities as a result of a difference in cultural styles of language use and interactional patterns, that can be problematic for those moving across cultural borders between settings.

Rosina Merry (2004) finds evidence of similar dissonance in her Aotearoa/ New Zealand study of the transition experience for children in an early childhood centre where they were organised into groups on the basis of their age i.e. infants, toddlers and preschoolers. She found that these transitions created discontinuities both for parents and children which the interviewees saw as undesirable but inevitable. While the children were 'experts' in one social world they became 'novices' in the next and were seen to be on a see-sawing continuum. Merry poses that educational institutions can construct expectations, social worlds and identities by the way they group children and that teachers' need to be reflective and to compare this perspective with their own situation. Others such as Fthenakis (1998) would argue that children face a number of discontinuities in their lives and that learning to cope with change is part of the human condition.

The passive acceptance by parents in this case study of what they indicate is a less than desirable situation for their children is interesting, given that it should arguably be possible for them to influence change to the centre's grouping practice. In effect what is suggested here is that there is a power structure within the centre where the will of the power elite (*centre management*) dominates over the values and needs of a majority or sizeable minority (*parents and children*). In the view of Corsaro *et al.*, (2002) policies such as these that do not represent the values of all members of a group/society or allow them to have 'voice' have the effect of constraining the quality of life experienced by children and should therefore be rethought.

Whose responsibility is this? – the notion of ‘child readiness’

Continuity as a concept is tied closely in much of the literature to the notion of a child’s ‘readiness’ to enter school or an early childhood setting (eg. Brostrom, 2002; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Dockett & Perry, 2001; Griebel & Niesel, 1997, 2002; Johansson, 2007; Peters, 2000; Rosenthal, 2000). Graue (1992) suggests that readiness is a set of ideas or meanings constructed by people in communities, families and schools as they participate in the kindergarten experience and which emerge from community values and expectations related to individual children in terms of attributes such as their age, sex and kindergarten experience. Thus, in much of the literature a child’s ‘readiness’ is often constructed as being contextual, situation specific, locally generated, highly relative and views the child as an individual agent in the transition process.

In contrast Rogoff (1996) argues that questions about transitions can be fruitfully argued from a socio-cultural perspective that asks how children’s involvements’ in the activities of their communities change, rather than focusing on change as a property of individuals. From this view changes, including life transitions ‘are neither exclusively in the individuals nor exclusively in their environments, but are a characteristic of individuals’ involvement in ongoing activity with others.

To capture the nature of changing participation in socio cultural activity, Rogoff (1996) suggests they be studied on three different planes of analysis: the community, the interpersonal and the individual and that they be studied together with shifting foci (from background to foreground) through these lens. Corsaro *et al.*, (2002) note how Rogoff’s notion of participatory appropriation fits nicely with their notion of priming events through the shared argument that any event in the present is an extension of previous events and is directed towards goals that have not yet been accomplished. In this they view children as ‘apprenticing’ to become competent members in the environment and the importance of physical environment (objects and activities), children’s responsibilities and the supportive social environment (adults and peers) in children’s learning.

Ready schools (early childhood settings)

In recent times the concept of ‘ready’ school (*early childhood setting*) has increasingly entered the transition vocabulary, thereby indicating a gradual shift of power towards a greater understanding of transition as a partnership and process of change needing the attention of all parties to it (eg. Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Lam & Pollard, 2002). A ‘ready school (*early childhood setting*)’ is described by Graue (1999) as one that is ready to adapt to the diverse and changing needs of real children whose lives depend on the willingness of ‘others’ to extend themselves to them. In this Graue is suggesting a more equal sharing of responsibility by schools for ensuring the success of the transition experience from individual children and their parents to the school (*early childhood setting*) and that the school/ *early childhood setting* should offer suitable experiences for incoming children and be flexible in their approach. As active participants in this process of transition children are constructing, reconstructing and responding creatively and dynamically in the classroom situation. This will not necessarily result, however, in children meeting the expectations that

more ‘powerful others’ may have put in place for them, particularly where tensions occur due to differences in children’s background framework and consequently their ability to interpret the new environment (Corsaro *et al*, 2002; Griebel & Niessel, 2002; Lam & Pollard, 2006).

On this basis it is important to understand the contexts which have shaped children for the new experience, how children are likely to interpret, interact and settle in the new environment and for there to be a process which supports the new comer to become competent in the new context/ culture. A key finding of the Italian component of the study undertaken by Corsaro *et al.*, 2002 and one which has wider implications for the structural organisation of systems supporting transition processes is their identification of the importance of having parallel organisational structures in place between early childhood services and schools where teachers stay over time. They found this approach, which is bedded in policy approaches adopted by the Italian government, provided exceptional stability and strong emotional support for all parties to the transition - children, teachers and parents.

From home to early childhood setting - what can be learnt from the literature?

Selection of care – the role of childcare choice in transition

It is noticeable that the majority of transition literature focuses on transition to school which in most countries is a non-negotiable for children from the age of four onwards and their families. It is also unsurprising that the literature is seemingly silent on the area of school selection and ‘fitness for purpose’ and the role that parent choice plays in the transition process given that such things as zoning policies, the juggling of prescriptive school hours with hours that parents usually work and relatively homogenous school offerings within the more affordable state school system mitigate against parents and children having much choice.

Given the diversity of provision that characterises the early childhood sector within Aotearoa/ New Zealand there is potential for parents to choose early childhood settings for their children to attend that ‘fit’ with family cultural and philosophical belief systems. Conversely these choices are likely to be restricted by considerations of such things as opening hours, cost, flexibility, quality and accessibility. It is likely, however, that where there is choice parents will select services for their children where there is at least a perceived congruence between familial belief systems and the aspirations they have for their children. On these bases it is feasible and important to view parent choice of early childhood service as a key starting point in the transition process from home to early childhood setting for them and their children.

The goals of education policymakers as well as those of parents and educators have been observed to be changing in many societies. While the introduction of Western cultural perspectives, through education and training, has been pervasive, change is also the result of immigration policies in different countries and the political empowerment of indigenous and other cultural groups. The dilemmas that are created through the meeting of cultures and a desire for inclusion is challenging for teachers in early childhood services, especially when it comes to reconciling the different aspirations of individualist versus collective cultures. Rosenthal (2000) suggests that

conflicting cultural values may be at the base of any difficulties that early childhood services and schools may experience with involving parents.

In saying this Rosenthal (2000) challenges the frequently made assumption that there is a single universal model of high quality childcare. She argues that many of the quality characteristics of childcare that assume to benefit children are practices by which members of the white middle class help children acquire skills and knowledge that are valued in their cultural community. In contrast, for example, children in Zambia are assumed to learn through apprenticeship, imitation and experimentation. The implications of this are that everyone needs to be aware of and understand their basic assumptions about how children learn, to find out how these assumptions differ from those of families of the children in others care, especially where there is a meeting of individualistic versus collective cultural values, and attempt to reach agreement with families in regard to valued practices within care and education settings.

The question of congruence and similarity

A number of researchers who have studied parent choice of early childhood service have found that parents who consider the influence of the child's relationship with the caregiver as important were more likely to choose home-based care than a centre-based service for infants and toddlers while those who chose centre-based settings were more likely to emphasise developmental and educational outcomes (Seo, 2003; Vincent & Ball, 2006). Among the criteria reported for parents selecting family day care are a caregiver with similar values and a home-like setting because it is perceived as more closely replicating home-care with mother than centre-based care (Kontos, 1992; Larner, 1996; Seo, 2003; Vincent & Ball, 2006).

These researchers advise respect for the wisdom of parent choices and suggest that working mothers who adhere to the 'home as haven' ideology, as described by Beecher (in Rapp & Lloyd, 1989), believe that the mother figure is the only person who can provide 'refuge' for her family and, therefore, may use home-based services more heavily than they use centre-based in order to reduce the dissonance between their beliefs and their behaviours (Kontos, 1992; Rapp & Lloyd, 1989; Taylor, Pollard & Dunster, 1999). Along these same lines, Steinberg and Green (1979) reported that parents using family day care perceived more congruence between their values and those of their caregivers than did parents using centre-based services. Thus for these parents it was important to seek care for their children which most closely resembled their own. Conversely, researchers such as Rosenthal (2000) and Vincent & Ball (2006), consider this view of congruent values and beliefs to be an unlikely reality. They believe instead that there is likely to be only limited congruence and similarity between parents and educators in child-rearing goals, beliefs and the nature of their interactions with children because the two child rearing contexts are very different, as are the socialising roles and histories of the children (Rosenthal, 2000).

Kontos (1992) poses that perhaps the intricacies of parent/ caregiver relationships in the context of home-based services need to be more closely explored and that for all its warmth, perceived congruence and informality, relations between parents and caregivers can become complicated because it isn't neutral territory in the same way a centre is. She contends that family day care providers, those who work with them and users of these services seem to be suspended in judgement between the public world

with its ideology of professional caregiving and education and the private world with an ideology of motherhood. Related to this is the identification by Kontos (1992) that, in choosing family day care over centre-based care, some parents are reluctant to visit family day care homes. The reasons given include a reluctance to inspect the private home of a stranger; reluctance of being perceived as not trusting a potential caregiver, particularly if childcare is scarce and/or parents need to establish a rapport with a caregiver; and a tendency not to view purchasing childcare from a family day care provider as a business arrangement (Kontos, 1992; Vincent & Ball, 2006).

The reluctance to initially visit places particular challenges in front of home-based early childhood providers given that an important aspect of any early childhood programme is the communication and relations between parents and caregivers (Dalli, 2000; Kontos, 1992; Rosenthal, 2000; Stonehouse, 1994; Stonehouse & Gonzalez-Mena, 2004; Vincent & Ball, 2006) It suggests that in the early stages of a care and education arrangement effort needs to be put into building mutual respect, understanding and trust between families and educators. Rosenthal (2000) suggests that it is only when this sort of rapport is established that they can begin to listen and to appreciate each others views, to understand the values on which they are based and that a partnership will develop between the major socialising agents of children (Rosenthal, 2000).

Some strategies identified by mothers as having helped them feel supported and listened to by teachers include: regular feedback and information sharing; respect for the way mothers liked to do things with their child; being able to ring the early childhood service to check how one's child was doing; and having guidance on specific strategies that might help ease the separation. The mothers also noticed things like how attuned the teacher was to their child and whether they felt reassured about their competence by the way they responded to their child (Dalli, 2000).

Despite the importance of relationship building and the role of communication within this, very few studies have examined what constitutes effective communication in this role or communication patterns between parents and family day care providers. One study to do this (Kontos, 1992) reported that while centre-based providers talked with more parents each week, those in home-based care spent almost an hour each week talking with parents (as opposed to 13.7 minutes in centres). However, while parental and caregiver reports suggest that both parties value communication and regularly communicate with each other, observational studies, lead us to question how well these intentions are put into action (Kontos, 1992; Vincent & Ball, 2006).

Family day care appears to be distinguished from other early childhood services through the emphasis that educators place on family centred values and beliefs (Stonehouse, 2001; White, 2004). In White's study, the strong belief educators had in the family as institution meant educators viewed their own families as an integral part of family day care quality and that this could either enhance or limit the experience for other children. In addition it meant that caregivers' private views strongly influenced their practice. For this reason Waayer (2001 in White, 2004) suggests that the matching process, where selection of care is made on behalf of children and their families is critical if care arrangements are to ensure the wellbeing of children. Other strategies include consumer education for parents about childcare, training for

educators regarding working with parents and effective childcare search strategies that include visitation (Kontos, 1992).

Conclusion

The literature highlights the complexity of the transition process that occurs for children, their families and teachers as they move from home to early childhood service, between early childhood services or to school. While multiple theoretical approaches have been adopted to study the area of transitions, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model has clearly been the preferred model for exploring the dynamics and interrelationships that are at play between cultural and societal systems at every level while children familiarise with new settings. Those who criticise the ecological approach (eg. Corsaro *et al.*, 2002) do so on the basis of its limitations in accounting for the collective nature of human socialisation processes and the potential impact that power regimes at all levels can have on the quality of life experienced by children. On one thing the literature is clear – this is the importance of ensuring continuity of experience for all children as they transition. While this remains a problematic concept it does have the effect of challenging teachers, parents and children to understand what this means and as a starting point to give priority to developing relationships that are built on mutual understanding and trust. In this respect socialisation through transition is not something that happens to children. Rather it is a process in which children are key players and where, in interaction with the people, places and things around them, they make sense of the world. In comparison to the work that has been done on understanding transition to school, the literature is relatively silent on what the process of moving from home to early childhood setting means for young children.

CHAPTER THREE

Research design and methodology

Research question and study design

What is the nature of the practices and systems that foster a sense of wellbeing and belonging for young children and their families as they transition from home to ‘formal’ home-based care and education settings?

To capture the nature of the home-based transition the study is located within the ‘matching’ process and the first six weeks of a child settling into HFDC. The reframed question is intended to allow broad and rich description of how participants experience the systems and practices which underpin ‘transition’ into a home-based setting. The descriptions of the transition process that emerge from the baseline data collection and action research methodology are central to the research approach.

Research design

This is a descriptive and exploratory study that has employed mixed methods of data collection and analysis – both quantitative and qualitative. The aim of the study is to expand theory and practice knowledge in relation to home-based transitions using survey, interview, focus group and case study methods within an action research approach. The qualitative aspects of the study are the result of a desire to observe naturally occurring activities and practices in context (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The approach is inductive and aligns with interpretivist paradigms (MacNaughton & Rolfe, 2001). The study is located across multiple sites (educator homes) within Hutt Family Day Care.

Working within an ecological framework

‘Transition’ is a theoretically complex field of study that has largely been studied through the lens of the ecological model of child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1997). In the view of Kay Margetts (in Dunlop and Fabian, 2007) the ecological approach provides a comprehensive framework for exploring the complexity of the transition process through its focus on interaction, interrelatedness and human agency. The approach was recommended as an underpinning framework for analysing the data collected in the current study due to its congruency with the approaches that were taken during data collection.

This research explores the nature of these interactions and relationships within a framework of systems and processes which underpin transitions for new families entering HFDC. Its conceptual framework is based on Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory of learning and development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Bronfenbrenner proposed that contexts or settings influence development at different levels. He emphasized in particular the importance of the relationships between these settings including the relationships between the individual and the settings in which they operate. This theoretical framework acknowledges the complexity of the home-based

education and broader early childhood education context in this country and the influence of contexts on learning and development for young children, parents, teachers, whanau and communities.

At the level of the microsystem home-based transitions are influenced by the interactions that occur between the families and the home-based service. The next level, or mesosystem, relates to connections between these settings and the broader community within which the home-based care occurs. At the macrosystem it relates to the sub culture of dominant beliefs and ideologies of the society in which the family/child lives, that is the connections with society, sectors and the broader community.

Data collection methods and tools

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches have been taken to data collection. The approaches used include parent report and description of dialogue, conversations, and related behaviours, actions and artefacts as recorded by educators, parents and researchers across multiple sites of study within the HFDC home-based network. The influence of HFDC practices and systems on how 'transition' is experienced by participants in the process was explored using a survey, interviews and case studies involving journals and video footage across all research participants –parents, their children, educators and co-ordinators.

Phases one and two of the research plan were fully completed.

- Phase one includes a parent survey and parent and educator interviews.
- Phase two is solely focussed on action research. It involves a completed case study of farewells and reunions.
- Phase three of the research was underway when the research stopped. Data documenting the settling process across the full day for two children, their families and two educators was to be collected for the first 6 weeks of new care arrangements.

Data analysis

During each phase of the data collection cycles early patterns in the data have been documented for later development into tighter, more detailed definitions and then concepts (Delamont, 2002). Categorising data both conceptually and empirically means that as the analytical process develops these categories can give support to theory creation (Dey, 1993). Opportunities occurred during the field work phase for researchers and participants to discuss and triangulate their interpretations of data, and to consolidate some initial insights. These insights contributed to the concluding phase of data analysis.

Carol Mutch's (2005) analysis framework was used as the basis for data analysis. The key components of the framework are:

- Browse – read with an open mind to see what this data is 'telling you'. Is there anything that has asked you to ask yourself questions?
- Highlight – any repeating themes, words, ideas, agreeing, disagreeing ideas, similarities, differences
- Coding – this is the first step in 'determining categories'. The coding is still quite loose. Notes/ideas are made in the margin of the work.

- Group and label – this is a closer look at the data that has already been browsed, highlighted and coded. Themes will emerge. Ideas may be written on pieces of paper so they can be physically moved and regrouped as themes emerge.
- Themes and categories - what are the themes that are emerging from the data? Are they more prominent than others? Is there any linkage ?
- Consistency – having decided on the themes to be explored and relating them back to the original text, and from your own experience, knowledge, reading, understanding and common sense, do these ideas ring true?
- Select examples – from the data collected to support what you have found out
- Report findings – with a possible theoretical explanation of why these conclusions have been reached and this may lead to further research.

The presentation of raw data in paper rather than electronic format precluded the use of electronic analysis packages to collate and categorise data and meant that research analysis had to be undertaken manually.

Data analysis focused on data collected via the questionnaire, interviews, focus groups, observations and diaries of all participants, excluding children, for phase one and phase 2.. This meant that analysis for each phase comprised:

Phase one –baseline data

- parent survey and telephone interviews
- parent interviews
- educator focus groups

Phase two – Action Research (not completed)

Separations and reunions

- Educator focus – diaries and semi-structured interviews.

Participants provided feedback on transcripts and have contributed to initial and ongoing analysis of the survey and action research cycles. In addition, the collection methods have allowed for triangulation of findings across different participant groups and methods of data collection (Delamont, 2002; Denzin, 2001; Dey, 1993).

Quality Assurance

Ethical concerns

Standard ethical considerations apply. Ethics approval was obtained in the first instance from the Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) Ethics Committee. The change of researchers for the project was advised to the VUW Ethics Committee at the time work recommenced on the project. It was removed from the VUW Ethics Register and a new proposal was submitted to the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand Ethics Committee. For reasons of continuity the new proposal was based on the terms of the Ethics approval gained from VUW at the outset of the project. In addition, approval was sought for a new researcher and associates to have access to the already collected data for analysis purposes. Consent for the data analysis phase was gained from The Open Polytechnic Ethics Committee. Original participants were advised and separate consent was obtained from them. The identity of individual participants

is anonymous and participants have the right to withdraw from the project at any point.

Research Partnership

The validity of any insights arising from the data at the analysis phase has been checked with the HFDC coordinators who have been involved throughout the project. They participated in the original conception of the project and subsequent data collection, both as researchers and participants. Their input has been important for guiding the narrative that results from the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS - Parent Views and Experiences

This chapter reports on key themes and ideas presented by parents about their experience and views on the transition process they encountered when their child(ren) were starting at Hutt Family Day Care. Parents were asked to respond to a written survey and were given the option of follow-up phone interviews where their responses to the survey questions were probed in more depth. Forty-five parents were sent a written survey form with 42 questions to complete (see appendix). Parents were given the opportunity on a sliding scale of 1-4 to indicate their level of satisfaction with the service and the level of importance they attached to aspects of the transition process. All questions had a space for parents to make additional comment. Twenty-six completed forms were returned (r=58%) with 76% of respondents who returned forms willing to participate in a follow-up telephone interview. Forms were returned directly to the research associates. These were the only two people to view the data. In this way parent confidentiality and anonymity was assured.

Key areas of focus for the parent survey were their views and experience of:

- Initial contacts and arrangements
- Separation and reunions
- Support they received
- Aspects parents considered important for a successful transition
- How the Hutt Family Day Care process was for them

Parent and child-related demographic profile of respondents

The following child-related characteristics emerged from the survey data:

- The survey respondents between them had 27 children participating in Hutt Family Day Care. Of these 16 were male and ranged in age from 3 months to 3 years 10 months and 11 were female ranging in age from 1 year to 4 years 1 month.
- The majority of children were under one year old (n=15) when they began. Eight children started when they were between one and two years of age and a further 4 started when they were 2 -2.5 years old.
- For 52% it was their first child to be placed in home-based care; for 22% it was their second child; for 18.5% it was their third child; and for 7.5% it was their fourth child.
- 63% (n=35) were looked after by one educator while 33% (n=18) moved between more than one educator.
- The majority of children were in home-based care for up to two years and after this time participation tends to fall away.

In summary the demographic data provided by parents suggests that the majority of children are very young in age when they start, with over half of them under one year old. The data indicates also that participation in HFDC services gradually declines as children grow older and that by the age of 4 years the majority of children have left, possibly attending centre-based services, at least for part of a day. For just over half the parents it was the first time that parents had used home-based care. Approximately one-third of the children had more than one educator. This happens where parents wish to increase child hours and the existing educator does not have the capacity to accommodate the increase. These data suggest that the use of home-based care is a new experience for many parents and that in the case of children being cared for by two educators there is the possibility of them having to transition into and across multiple settings within a short space of time.

The Importance of Relationships

The relationship aspect of transition is a strong theme in the parent data. The stated aim of Hutt Family Day Care is to build the partnership (with parents) from the first encounter the parent has with the educator and his/her home. This starts with what Wright (2004) calls developing a history together. File (2001) maintains that partnerships are formed through shared decision-making and a sense of equality within the relationship.

The COI research data suggests that ‘developing a history together’ starts from the moment that a parent rings a co-ordinator to enquire about a placement. The findings of Wright, (2004) concur. This aspect is strengthened when co-ordinators follow-up with parents in their own home and particularly when co-ordinators assist parents to consider the characteristics of the person they would ideally like as educator for their child and the nature of the care and education they would like their child to be part of. Ninety-two percent of parents responded that they regarded this question as very important and 8% that it was important.

The facilitated nature of this interchange appears to challenge parents to think about the nature of the care and education arrangement in a deeper way. Parents also indicated that they appreciated the initial co-ordinator’ contact via a phone call and the visit they made to their home. They viewed this as a two-way process where they were both learning about the care arrangement and having input into it. At the same time it provides co-ordinators with an opportunity to engage in a deeper way with the family’s home and culture. Parents commented on the initial visit to their home as follows:

They got me to focus on the actual care and what it looks like. They brought up a lot of things which caused us to think – gender, ethnicity, location of educator, would older or younger kids there be a good thing, lots of other children or not many. Then they suggested thinking a bit more about times and days.

One parent who travels some distance to the educator’s home said:

I couldn’t have chosen better myself and to be honest, if it had been mediocre, I would have put him into a local facility by now.

Two specific comments referred to: “Finding someone you are comfortable with” and “Your personality should fit with the educatorreally important to get on with them. ... [They have] a big impact on your child’s life.”

It is interesting to note that the only parent who found it unnerving to have the coordinators coming to her home was a parent who had not had initial phone contact with the co-ordinators because she had met the educator independently at a social function and together they had agreed that the care arrangement would be a good idea.

The nature of the relationship – initial perceptions

The parent survey and telephone follow-up interviews allowed the researchers to explore in more depth how parents view their role in the educator/ parent partnership and the opportunities they have to ‘influence’ the quality of the care and education their child will experience. It appears that views were formed at an early stage by parents about the likely nature of the relationship they would have with educators. Views related to their initial engagement with educators and also whether educators held formal early childhood qualifications. It was evident that educators who were qualified in early childhood education, or who presented at the initial meeting as very experienced and confident in their knowledge were viewed by parent respondents as the ‘expert’ to whom they could defer for advice and support in regards to what was best for their child.

The following comment typifies those of parents who tended to categorise educators as ‘professionals’ and ‘experts’:

She is particularly competent and experienced. Gave her quite a bit of information about my daughter and her routines and felt she would ask if she needed to know more. She did ask questions about going to the toilet and I felt she knew quite a lot about her. I spent time there with her and she said she was happy for me to go.

Where the notion of ‘expert’ was not so evident in responses it appeared that parents were more likely to view themselves as partners in the care and education endeavour. These parents provided a picture of shared decision-making where parents and the educator agree on key aspects of the daily routine such as outings, food, whether a playgroup session on the same day as the child attends a session at kindergarten is manageable and the development of joint positive guidance strategies. The phrase “working as a team” was used by one parent, as was “We’ve worked together to fine tune sleep times and ways of getting her settled”. Another parent described the developing partnership as follows:

Definitely saw it as a two-way process where we both needed to contribute our thoughts as to what would work. I contributed things like, ‘This is his special toy or interests etc that you can use to settle him’. She was using her experience to say, ‘Its OK if he cries, I’ll phone, you go and trust me’. I always had total trust in the educator. She is very experienced, has a way about her, and a lovely relationship with kids.

There is a sense that some parents feel very involved in their child’s learning through the ongoing communication that occurs between them and the educators, especially at the end of each day. For others, the demands on educators make it difficult for them to communicate with educators in what to them is an ideal and timely way about their

children. This, in their view, mediated against the development of a responsive and reciprocal relationship between them and an educator.

Settling and Familiarisation

Settling or familiarisation time for children usually begins before the contractual arrangement formally commences. While co-ordinators are present for the introductory meeting between educator and parents, they are not generally present for ongoing meetings. The amount and type of familiarisation time is determined by mutual agreement between educator and parent.

The data suggests that this is a tension-filled time for parents as they feel anxious about meeting the new person who is going to look after their child. It is important, therefore, for parent induction to a new setting to be a well supported, open and empathetic process. The survey responses suggest that the level of support parents received from educators during this process was highly satisfactory (68%) and satisfactory (32%). Seven parents made a comment that the familiarisation time was a “good time to see for yourself that everything is as it should be or as described by the coordinator”.

Parents indicated also that the initial meeting needs to be well structured and have clarity of purpose. Some respondents suggested that this was an area to be worked on (48%). They also indicated a desire to have comprehensive information about the educator, her family living at home, routines and husband’s work hours, the other children attending and a brief outline of the programme (56%). As well, they wished to meet the other children who would be present during the hours when their child would be attending.

Continuity between settings – linkages and priming events

A number of strategies were employed by parents and educators to facilitate a sense of ‘continuity’ between their home and the home-based care and education setting. The findings probe and give ‘voice’ to the concerns identified in the literature on how ‘continuity’ can be effected for parents and children in a family day care transitional context.

The main strategies that were used include:

- Preparing children prior to the time they begin their new care arrangement by talking a lot about going to the educator and promoting this as a positive new experience. One parent described how she gets to the educator’s house ten minutes before the educator returns from dropping her own children at school and how “I talk it through with him as her car is arriving and the excitement mounts up”.
- Bridging the home to home-based care and education setting by providing toys and equipment which freely move between the two houses was viewed as important by parents for helping children to settle in the new environment.
- Providing consistency of routines and practices. The development of these were identified as being dependent on the information sharing and decision-

making that occurred between parents and educators prior to and at the beginning of the new home-based care and education arrangement.

- Ongoing communication between home and home-based educator about key events that have happened at home and in care via either face-to face or written diaries (or both).

The importance of effective communication

Respondents viewed ongoing communication as a key strategy contributing to the development of a meaningful relationship between parents and educators, and ensuring a sense of linkage between home and early childhood service is maintained. Conversations were identified as most likely to happen at the end of a day, at pick up time, or via the written communication that occurs in diary form. Parents and educators alike appear to appreciate good communication.

Parents commented on these aspects in the following ways:

There is a flow on between what is happening at home. She finds out what we have been up to and makes it relevant. The two worlds are not separate.

I've written lengthy things in the diary. With him only attending two days I think it is important for her to know what is happening on other days, to fill in what is going on in our life.

She rings on a Friday and discusses how the week has gone. She rings me regularly if there is something exciting that has happened during the day.

There's the diary and I know what he has been doing.

Very good with the diary. I'm always up to speed.

She is careful to explain what she has done and why it is an extension of home.

A parent who was unhappy with communicating via the diary and preferred to have a more in depth verbal dialogue noted the following:

There is not time provided to talk with the educator. In the morning she is needing to do a 'kindy' drop and at 5pm she has her own children. I can freely phone her but I feel a bit bad doing that in her time and it would be good to have a meeting or a fortnightly phone call. I use the diary for sharing information but there is a lack of time to communicate.

Settling children - the challenge of separation

Settling of children, being available to return to the care site to settle a child, if needed, and being welcomed back to the house by the educator, were cited as important by a number of parents. Four parents noted that they consciously gave themselves plenty of time at the start of the day to sit and play with their children at the educator's. The data suggests also that parents like to spend extra time at the educator's with their children at the end of the day.

Despite trusting or liking educators, the survey results indicate that initial parent/child separations are difficult for both parents and children. For parents this was often to do with their feelings rather than from them not being confident in an educator. When asked to describe this in detail, parent comments included that it was “terrifying”, and “It was one of the hardest things to do”. Other terms that were used included: “very difficult”; “cried”; “worried”; and “nervous”. Some parents said though that, “Separation is part of the process of you letting go and letting someone else play a role in your child’s life”. One parent said that it was difficult even though she had done this before with an older child. Nearly three-quarters of parents said it was difficult or very difficult to leave their child and the remaining one-quarter said there were no difficulties. The majority of parents (76%) also felt their children found separating difficult when starting family day care and that this was related to strangeness and the need to build trust with a new person. Educator empathy was viewed as a key aspect in assisting them and their children to bridge the separation.

In addition it was apparent from the parent responses that they had personal concerns about whether the nature of the relationship between them and their child would alter due to having an educator involved, as an additional person, in the ongoing care and education of their child. Another aspect related to children who couldn’t yet talk and how parents would know if something was wrong.

The respondents suggested that it could take anything from no time to 12 months (or never) for them to feel totally comfortable about leaving their child. Four to six weeks was the period of time suggested by parents that it took to settle themselves. Parents also indicated that they felt this timeframe was similar for children (75%).

Factors influencing the degree of ‘settledness’ for parents were child-related, and related to the ease with which their child entered the family day care arrangement. Specific signals they looked for include:

- their child didn’t cry when they left
- their child was settled and knew the routine
- notes showed that routines were being consistently followed
- their child had a positive relationship with the educator

Transition as a community ‘affair’

It was apparent also that the relationships that are made through the family day care arrangement often extend beyond the times a child attends the setting. Five parents talked about seeing the educator on a social basis outside formal hours of care. The activities participated in included taking their children swimming at the weekend, sharing getting their school-aged children to or from school, and sharing birthday parties. One parent talked of cooking a meal for her educator when she was sick. The latter comment indicates the extent to which relationships can develop between some parents and educators in family day care. These responses also illustrate that blurring of the boundaries can occur between business/ friend/ and babysitting in family day care. Later in this report, educators’ responses indicate there can be tensions within their care arrangements when this blurring occurs. As researchers we suggest that this is an area for further exploration.

Summary of key themes from the parent data

- Positive, responsive and reciprocal relationships underpin successful transition. It is important to have processes in place to foster the development of such relationships.
- Relationships within the transition process for home-based care and education are complex and include multiple parties who each have a major interest in ensuring the wellbeing and belonging of children (and parents) as they move between home contexts. Key participants are co-ordinators, educators, parents and children.
- Facilitated entry to home-based care and education is important for parents –it is through this process that parents start to build a relationship with the educator who will be looking after their child(ren) and to come to terms with the change that is about to occur in their family lives. Parents are seeking reassurance that their children will be well cared for and contented with the educator who will be looking after them.
- Co-ordinators have an important role at parents' point of entry to a home-based network. They are responsible for initial matching of parents/ children and educators. It is the information they collect, their knowledge of educators in the network and facilitation of initial meetings which underpin the establishment of an effective care and education relationship between parents and educators.
- Transition can be a time of both 'tension' and 'anticipation' for parents, and children as they grapple with their pending separation. The process involves moving from the familiar (their home) to the unfamiliar (educator home/ network and work) and then increasingly becoming familiar with the new context of new people, places and things as well as rituals, routines and regular events –establishing a sense of self and identity in the new setting.
- For children their transition within the home-based context is dynamic and ongoing – the data suggests that transitions occur whenever there are changes to the status quo in the setting. Holidays and changes in routines and rituals can all have an effect and appear to be ongoing transitions.
- Children and their parents are all unique and therefore every transition is likely to be different. Educators need to be flexible and adaptable.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS – Educators’ Views and Experiences

This chapter focuses on the views of educators (as opposed to those of parents which were outlined in the previous chapter) on the transition process. Seventy-two percent of educators (n=13) collectively participated in two semi-structured interviews. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. A further six kept diaries for varying periods and times during the first six weeks of care for a new child where they focused on farewells and reunions. These data sources form the basis for the description of findings provided below.

The Importance of relationships

The data show that educators view transition for parents’ as starting at the point they are actively organising care for their child. Educators consider equal consideration should be given to parents and children when developing transition processes. They believe that transition is ongoing, changes in form and is different for every family depending on:

- how fast children familiarise with and settle in their new environment,
- the nature of the relationships between educator, parents and children, and
- the nature and extent of change that happens to the group in the educator’s home during this time.

When a new member enters an educator’s home he or she triggers a change of routine and relationships for all members of the participating group; each new entrant has a different impact. In effect this means that all members of the group are experiencing a form of transition in order to accommodate the new child and his or her parents. Educators contend, therefore, that the entry process and how it is facilitated, and the relationships that develop as result, are crucial to the success of the ongoing family day care arrangement.

The data indicate that educators and parents believe that having processes in place to help the establishment of positive, reciprocal and responsive relationships between parents and educators is essential for ensuring that a family day care arrangement gets off to a good beginning. Positive relationships at the start are likely to be sustained over time. For this reason educators are prepared to invest significant time into the initial stage of a care arrangement and into parents feeling comfortable about leaving their children. Skills in working with and developing effective relationships with adults were considered essential for success in the educator role given the complexity and closeness of the relationships which develop *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) confirms the words of these educators when it emphasises the importance of involving parents and partnering with them in decision-making and confirms adults as powerful influences in children’s lives who need to recognise that their own beliefs, assumptions and attitudes influence children.

Open communication and trust – essential ingredients

Educators expressed their belief that open, ongoing and responsive communication underpins the development of effective relationships. For example, many parents want to know how their child is settling and what they can do to help. As one educator noted:

It is always a difficult time for a parent to leave, especially if it is for the first time. It does get easier over time. It is about parents trusting me, [and] that is why it is important that I click with the parents. I look for someone who I can build a relationship with. I am looking for them to trust me, and being able to talk with them and getting to know them is also a way of keeping in touch with the child.

Educators suggest that where there isn't trust, parents won't feel comfortable leaving their children, and that, in turn, any lack of trust will be transmitted to children. This is especially important in home-based care where the educator is the main and often only person to interact with children on an ongoing and daily basis. There was consensus on the need to say "No" to a care and education arrangement if it didn't feel right. Respondents acknowledged that the judgement of 'good fit' was often intuitive.

The importance of initial 'matching'

Educators believe that co-ordinators play an important role in the development of relationships during the beginning of a new care and education arrangement. They view them as being key to facilitating 'entry' to the care and education site through the support they provide to parents and educators who are navigating a range of tensions, emotions and complexities. Educators identified that for parents this can relate to the emotion and possible sense of guilt attached to separation from their young child and worry about their child's wellbeing in a new place. For some parents it is the first time they have been separated from their children.

For educators, there can be tensions surrounding the start of a new family. These were articulated in terms of self esteem and identity, and concerns such as, 'Will they like me?' 'Is my house good enough?' 'Are they are more educated than me?'

Coordinators play a key support, advice and guidance role at the first meeting between parent(s) and educators. It is an occasion for educators and parents to get to know each other and for educators to learn something about parents' goals and values for their child. The sharing of background information about parents and children that the coordinators gather during their initial meeting with parents at the parents' home was viewed as being very useful by the majority of educators. Educators indicated that this information made it easier for them to quickly make connections to the child and parents and aspects of their family life. They indicated that the right amount of information was provided. Interestingly one educator preferred not to receive prior information as she liked to take the first visit on face value. Educators noted also that it is important to meet both parents at the introduction.

While coordinators have a critical role in the initial matching process, their role becomes less crucial over time to the 'settling' process as educators and parents develop a day-to-day relationship. Educator/ parent relationships are often strengthened through the 'filling in of the bits' about home life, which happens via the

child as the care arrangement progresses, especially if the child is of an age to share information in daily conversations and as the educator and children move about the local community.

Settling and familiarisation – building a strong foundation

Offering food and drink to establish a welcoming and comfortable (homely) environment is a consistent strategy used by educators for their first meeting with new families. To prepare the environment for a first visit, educators usually put out appropriate toys, clean the house, secure the dog, create a quiet morning, make a cup of tea, do some baking and ensure they have something prepared that relates to what the child likes.

Educators also draw on the information provided by coordinators after their meeting at the parents' house, in order to establish common ground and links. Educators believe that these sorts of strategies help to give parents a sense that they and their child are valued. They utilise information gathered by the coordinator to help bridge the gap for the child between his or her home and the new setting. Through these actions Hutt Family Day Care aims to achieve continuity and consistency of experience for children where they

‘develop confidence and the trust to explore and establish a secure foundation of remembered and anticipated people, places, things and experience’ (Ministry of Education, 1996. p.46).

All educators say that it is important to be explicit about the current rules, routines and rituals associated with their home and to enter into negotiation and compromise (where this may be necessary) in regard to routines for a child at the outset of a new arrangement. They aim to foster children's sense of belonging in their settings through establishing routines and rituals which are familiar, unhurried, regular and where children can anticipate, enabling them to feel reassured and which are designed to minimise stress on both children and adults (ibid:55). These educators realise that as a new child and family come into the environment implicit rules and routines will themselves be acted on and may change.

Car time

Educators also indicate that on a few occasions they have parents who are worried about the amount of time children spend in a car as educators respond to broader arrangements that other parents have in place for their children. Educators advise parents that they like to use time in the car as an educative opportunity. They seek to reassure new parents of the learning that takes place in the car as well as the benefits for children's learning that home-based care allows through the authentic way they are able to stay connected to their local community.

A caregiver stated she reassured them by saying:

This is where we sing songs, look at geography, count buses etc. We are usually going somewhere and children get excited. They enjoy going out into the world.

The process of familiarisation is described as one of getting to know each other and the setting, which can take time. Educators believe it is important to be organised, to ideally have visits prior to starting (although this isn't always possible) and to take time for talking with parents. One educator commented in the following way:

It is essential that any child coming into my house knows where the bathroom, dining room, kitchen, sleep room and garden are and how to access them. Then they will feel safe and confident about toileting, eating, sleeping and playing. It is essential that they feel welcome and that they know I love their company.

Educators give children plenty of opportunities to follow their own interests. The words of this educator aptly represent the approach that most respondents take to transition:

I have learnt that the children settled more quickly and easily if they had opportunities to explore upon arrival so now I have familiar activities/ items out and ready for when they arrive. There is only a small emphasis on this though as I like the child to be able to make choices about what they would like us to do and to encourage their own thinking, and [their] independence.

Farewells

Farewells and reunions were a particular focus of the research cycle which educators reflected on in their diaries and discussed at the educator interviews. A theme of 'anxious' parents emerged. Parents agreed - they identified that initial separation from their child was an anxious time for them. The educator data indicated that they are mindful of this and believe it is important to invest as much time and support in parents as in children. Educators commented that it:

Often [it] takes longer to settle in parents than children.

Sometimes parents are anxious and want to stay for too long. If anxious you do need to say 'go' quickly and ring in half an hour – it is important to have an open door and contact policy.

It's important to take it slowly with a parent – they may go for a period and come back. I prefer them to come once or twice before care starts. This makes it an easier transition as when this has happened I know more about child and family.

I have a young anxious parent so I give her a cup of coffee in the evening and space to talk about the day.

There was general agreement among educators that it was best for parents to leave the site quickly after children formally commence care, although a clear rationale was not provided for why they thought this. Educators also commented that they like to keep lines of communication open during the day, especially when a child is new as this helps with the leaving aspect which parents often find difficult. One educator articulated it in the following way, "I like them to know that they can ring or that I will".

Diaries were viewed as useful to fill gaps, both for educators and parents. These are expected to be filled in daily by educators and parents and provide an ongoing record about children and significant events in their daily lives. They are also used to convey

messages between a child's and the educator's home. Educators said texting is being used increasingly as a way to maintain communication through the day. This is likely to be because it is less intrusive than a phone-call.

Reunions

Feedback from educators on reunions reinforces other data about their concern for parents in the transition process and their desire to offer parents support. Educators expressed a view that children who don't want to go home can be disturbing for parents and that they seek to reduce this pressure. One educator expressed this awareness in the following way:

I try not to be too involved in an activity they don't want to stop at pick up time.

Conversely educators indicated that it is difficult for them when parents arrive and children are behaving differently to how they have been during the day. In the words of other educators:

It is difficult when parents arrive and their children are behaving differently to how they have been during the day.

The new parent felt very nervous when I was late home early on in arrangement.

Signs of 'settledness'

A common theme from educators associated a 'settled' child with ideas of security, independence and being wholly engaged in the life of the home-based setting. Educators (as were parents), were asked to identify the signals that they identified with a child feeling settled in their home. Educators tended to look for signs of the children's increased confidence, their engagement with the environment and others within the programme and their capacity to happily say goodbye to parents at the beginning of a day. Aggressive and sad behaviour were seen as signs that a child was still unsettled. These descriptions build on and extend those provided by parents. Specific indicators used by educators to judge child 'settledness' include children:

- exploring the house
- walking straight in and doing something such as reading a book
- saying goodbye happily to parents
- eating
- initiating a conversation
- asking the educator to do something
- ignoring her parents
- following the routines of the household such as sitting on chair without being told
- saying 'Hi' to parents at end of day and carrying on playing
- snuggling in for a cuddle with the educator

Transitions for others

Educators reported that the focus on a new child has implications for the other children being looked after in their home and also for the educator's own children.

The nature of the effect often depends on the age of the new child and how involved the other children are in helping to settle the new entrant. Educators expressed the view that children already in care don't have a choice about the new child who is coming and that it is important to think of them when a new care arrangement is about to commence given the small size of the group. They also commented that the more intense attention they usually gave to new children could mean that other children had less attention paid to them during the initial stages of a new care arrangement. It was suggested that additional assistance would be helpful at these times.

While educators generally advised other families that a new child was starting it was unclear from the data whether and how educators facilitate meetings between new and existing families. One educator indicated that she didn't do anything and left it to the families to make their own links. As noted in the previous chapter, this is an area some parents want more information and input from the network.

The educators also think that it is important to prepare their own families for a new care arrangement but that this can sometimes simply be letting them know there will be a new child joining the group and coming to their home. They said that it is also important for their husbands and children to meet the new family. One caregiver gave the example:

My husband has just arrived home and shaken hands with a Dad doing a pick up. This reinforces for the Dad that he is welcome in our home. I like the families to meet my husband because he is home some days.

Some educators plan social events so everyone can meet. Other educators indicated that having home-based care and education happening in their home is not always straightforward for the educator's family. The following comments illustrate this latter point:

They can sometimes think these children are taking over.

My own child started to wet his pants again with the new child in care.

Teenagers can get annoyed with crying babies and when the children move stuff.

Another potentially complicating dimension of being an educator, as was also noted in the chapter reporting parent data, is that the relationship can extend into a strong friendship between parents and educators. Educators suggest that this can be a complex situation to work within as they move between business, friend and babysitting roles, the latter being where they are asked to look after children outside times when they are formally enrolled with the home-based network.

In summary some key points about transitions identified by educators in their interviews and research diaries are:

All children and parents are different, and educators need to adapt accordingly.

Transition is a process involving several phases and many people connected to the educator's home and family.

Becoming familiar with people, places and things is an important facet of a child's transition.

Entry of a new child can mean transitions for all as they adapt to the new child, changed group dynamics and potentially different routines depending on whether the new child has other commitments which are being supported by the educator during the day. For example a child may also attend kindergarten or have additional art activities arranged.

Communication and trust are major factors that underpin the nature of the ongoing relationship that is established between educators and parents. The input of co-ordinators to the matching process at the outset of a care and education arrangement is a crucial aspect of the developing relationship.

The entry of a new family to a family day care home is a time of tension and anticipation for educators where they worry about whether the new parents will like them and 'is their home good enough'. Creating a 'homely' environment for the first visit by parents and co-ordinators was viewed as important.

Routines and rituals contribute to a child's sense of belonging (*Te Whāriki* p.55).

Roles and relationships in home-based care are complex because of the small size of the group of children attending. Because of this roles can become blurred as relationships become established with being required to commute between the roles of business person and friend.

CHAPTER SIX

Pulling the transition themes together

The review of the literature and ‘light’ analysis of Hutt Family Day Care data provide information that helps us to better understand the complexities of the transition processes for children, parents and educators in home-based care and education. Key themes and insights that emerge from these data about home-based care and education in HFDC include:

- Parents are integral to how children settle in home-based care and their needs must be considered as well as those of their children
- Children are likely to have multiple transitions to navigate within a short period in home-based care and education
- Home-based transitions are grounded in community
- Home-based care is a site of blurred boundaries, where public and private spaces often connect in an unclear way
- Building respectful and trusting relationships are paramount

Findings about Children’s Transitions in Family Day Care

Corsaro *et al.*, (2002) urge researchers to explore the notion of continuity for children as they move into and between settings. They have coined the term ‘priming events’ to describe activities which ask children (and adults) through their participation to attend prospectively to ongoing or anticipated changes in their lives. ‘Priming events’ and how they influence settling processes for young children are the focus of this study and are integral to the policies and practices followed by Hutt Family Day Care. They usually start before a new child formally enters a care and education arrangement and will continue for as long as it takes for a child to be deemed settled.

Co-ordinator meeting at parent’s home

The main aim of the ‘priming events’ events embedded in the Hutt Family Day Care matching processes is to foster continuity and congruence for children as they move from the familiar (home) to unfamiliar (educator home within a home-based setting). The development of trusting, respectful and reciprocal relationships through clear and appropriate communication and interactions on an ongoing basis were identified as crucial for this to occur. The matching process starts at an adult level with initial exploratory conversations between co-ordinators and parents – by telephone and then at the family home. The visit made by co-ordinators to parents’ homes allows them to familiarise with a specific family context and to gain understanding of the interests, values and aspirations the family has for their children. It is evident that this engagement is intended to be authentic and empowering for families in that it allows

for a specific focus on children interacting with people, places and things in a familiar context. Despite being a 'snapshot in time' the information gathered at this meeting, through conversation and observation, underpins the subsequent matching of educator to family/children made by co-ordinators. Co-ordinators seek not only a good match of parents, children and educator but are also mindful of the broader 'fit' of a new child/ family to other children and families attending the educators home.

Multiple Transitions

The initial focus of the transition process on matching educators, families and children is identified by parents as an important aspect of beginning home-based care. This begins for children when they spend time at the educator's home with her and the other children who are likely to be attending. For some children who are enrolled in two homes during the course of a week this process happens in duplicate (one-third (33%) of young children are potentially enrolled with two educators). Additional demands are placed on children when they navigate a range of new settings in the broader local home-based network and community.

Children often attend multiple early childhood services while in the care of an educator. The options include attendance at a range of local early childhood services such as local community playgroups, playcentre and kindergarten and weekly attendance at the network's playgroup. It is also possible that young children will have to adjust to changes in the cohorts of children with whom they interact at an educator's home as different children may attend on different days of the week.

Within the home-based context the scenario of children commuting between sites during the early stages of a new care and education arrangement is a potentially challenging one for them given that their entry to the additional sites may occur without familiar adults (parents) and before they have fully familiarised with their educator and other children in the setting. Thus rather than moving with/ from the familiar to unfamiliar in partnership with well known adult(s) and others, new children are often likely to be in the position of negotiating these new spaces with adults and children whom they are still getting to 'know'.

Because of the potential for multiple transitions to occur on an ongoing basis and within a short timeframe from when a new child starts, the onus is effectively on educators, in partnership with parents and co-ordinators, to be aware of the additional challenges being placed on young children as they move between settings. The dimension of multiple transitions adds new complexity to our understanding of how entry into and the settling process is experienced in the home-based sector and the nature of the systems and processes that can effectively support multiple transitions. While the focus is on the single entry point into an educator's home as this is the key care and education site, it is important to also consider the multiple transitions that may occur for children and to have strategies in place to ensure that they occur in a considered and supportive way.

The role of ‘other’ children

Other children who attend the educator’s home are likely to be crucial in the settling of a new child both in and beyond the immediate home setting. Educator responses indicate that the entry of a new child can be a time when they have an intense focus on settling the new child and where they often require additional adult support. Where this isn’t available other children in the home often provide assistance, especially if they are old enough to undertake tasks associated with the routines of the home or can engage younger children in joint learning opportunities. Siblings are extremely effective when utilised in this way as their very presence ensures a connection for the younger child between the family home and the care and education setting.

Separations and reunions for children

Farewells and reunions were a particular focus of the research. Educators appeared focused on minimising the anxiety of parents and children at the time of separation particularly in the initial stages of a new care arrangement. To facilitate this educators draw heavily on information obtained from their initial meetings with co-ordinators, parents and children. In most cases a child will have spent time at the educator’s home with one or both parents prior to the beginning of the formal care and education arrangement. At these times opportunities are provided for children to familiarise with the layout, rules, rituals and routines of the educator’s home and often with some or all of the other children who will be attending with them. From the view point of educators it is important for children to get to know them and their home and to feel secure in their company prior to attending on their own for an extended period.

Parents also play a key role in preparing children for family day care and in supporting the development of connections between the child’s and the educator’s home. Parents indicated that when preparing children for their imminent separation they will: often talk about going to the educator’s home as a positive experience and arrive early and talk the day through with them. A theme emerged of adults wanting to create a bridge between homes, where the child’s home and that of the educator are seen as part of a bigger world where children, families and educators are active participants. Information sharing through diaries and other communication tools, the free movement of toys and equipment between the two homes and consistent routines are strategies used to build the desired sense of continuity between homes.

The data show that preparation for the reunion of children and parents is also important for children and the sense of wellbeing they experience while in the educator’s care. Educators in their daily practice appear to be aware of the need to be sensitive when programme planning to the requirements of a child’s attendance schedule and to avoid introducing new activities at ‘home’ time. They identify that as with farewells, reunions can be times of intense emotion for parents and children and that it is important to align the routines between settings as much as possible. Educator empathy, understanding and responsiveness were viewed by parents as integral to the sense of wellbeing experienced by children and themselves at farewell and reunion times.

Settledness – wellbeing and belonging

Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996) identifies that children’s wellbeing is promoted through ensuring they have as much consistency and continuity of experience as possible to develop confidence and trust in the new environment and to know that their needs will be responded to in a way that fosters their confidence and growing independence. For educators the following signposts emerged as indicators of a child’s growing confidence in the environment and with others in the programme:

- walking straight into the home and doing something;
- eating;
- initiating a conversation; asking the educator to do something;
- following the routines of the household without being prompted;
- saying “hi” to parents at the end of the day and carrying on playing;
- exploring the house;
- throwing a tantrum;
- snuggling in for a cuddle; and
- happily saying goodbye to parents.
-

Conversely, sad and aggressive behaviours were viewed as indicators that a child was still adjusting to the new environment. The research participants (educators and parents) consider that it takes children up to six weeks to settle and that the amount of time a child is enrolled for each week can make a difference to how quickly this happens.

Extended learning opportunities for all children

It is likely that all children and adults associated with a home-based early childhood education context will experience change of some sort when a new child and their family enter the group, due to its small size and intimacy. No more than four children are permitted to attend at one time. The nature of the change depends on the age of the child - it may entail a change to the group dynamic and to the daily routines for the other children in the group. As well, new adults become participating members of this small community.

While the entry of a new child has the potential to disrupt established routines for existing children, it can also be viewed as a positive time of change and extended learning for them as they engage with new people, places and things in the local community which are introduced to them via the new family.

The movement between sites which occurs when transporting children between their different commitments within the local community can mean that children spend significant amounts of time in a car each day. It means also that children engage in a meaningful way with the diversity of their local community and that the nature of this engagement is dynamic and can change for all children with the entry of someone new. While some parents express concern at the outset of the care arrangement about the time spent in the car, educators are usually able to reassure them that the car

provides valuable opportunities for extending children's learning, for group or one to one activities and for building relationships within the peer group and with adults. These opportunities may take the form of conversations where: the educator and children learn more about each other, their families and the local community; they sing together; or engage in early literacy and numeracy opportunities.

The deeper understanding and knowledge that is likely to result from time together in the car can be used by educators to build relationships between themselves and the children, between children, and to reinforce linkages between a child's and the educator's home. This finding concurs also with those of Wright (2004) where, in her study of the practice of two exemplary home-based educators, she identifies the car as being an important curriculum site.

Findings about Parents' Transitions into Home-based Care

Co-ordinators Role in the Matching Process

The 'matching' process begins for parents when they make initial phone contact with co-ordinators. This is followed by co-ordinators visiting the parents' home. The visit is a critical point in the transition process, as it is here that the relationship building between the network and parents' starts and that information which will inform the 'matching' of family and educator is collected.

Parents commented that meeting with the co-ordinators in their own home was very useful for making them think more deeply about the nature of the care and education arrangement they wanted and as a fore runner to meeting with educators. The co-ordinators describe the 'matching' that results as a 'best guess' on the basis of the information they have. The parent feedback suggests that the majority of parents are comfortable with having co-ordinators meeting them at their home and that it makes the entry process easier and clearer. They are generally pleased with the match to an educator which results (92%).

In analysing the data the research team is mindful of the literature which suggests some parents can be reticent to visit educator homes prior to care starting in a home-based care arrangement for reasons associated with: a reluctance to inspect the home of a prospective caregiver; worry about being perceived as not trusting this person; and a tendency not to view the care and education arrangement as a business one (Kontos, 1992). Kontos relates these concerns to the fact that the private home is the site of care and that this results in a blurring of the boundaries between private and public spheres because homes are less neutral spaces. The data indicate that the early contact with co-ordinators who facilitate the first meeting between educators and parents tends to reduce these tensions and to clearly establish the care and education arrangement as a business one from the outset.

Forming initial relationship/s

Following the initial contact with co-ordinators a meeting is arranged where parents meet educators in the educator's home, the site where their child(ren) will potentially be cared for. This meeting is facilitated by a co-ordinator although their role will vary

depending on the nature of the exchanges that occur between parents and educators. It is evident that educators treat this meeting seriously and generally make a substantial effort to create a warm and inviting (homely) environment for new parents – this may include home-baking, providing drinks and having a tidy house. The process was generally found to be effective by both educators and parents, although some parents expressed a wish for a more structured approach to the meeting. It was agreed that the facilitation of the co-ordinators helped to reduce the tensions and worries both parents and educators indicated they had prior to the meeting. It also ensures that the meeting is kept on a professional basis.

The first meeting is a “high stakes” time for both educators and parents. Educators indicated in discussion that this is a time when they are exposing themselves and their homes/families to co-ordinators and parents. These concerns can be personal in nature as educators worry about whether parents will like them and their home and how this will reflect on parent perceptions about them as educators. Conversely for parents this is the point at which they are confronting the decision to place their child in care and are facing the fact that separation from their child, with all the anxieties that may involve, is imminent.

Putting parents at ease and dealing with their anxieties emerged as a common theme from these meetings. The data suggest that most new parents wish to meet all those associated with the care and education of their child, including the educator’s immediate family, the parents of other children who attend and the children themselves. Educators identified that their own families shared a similar view as they like to know who they are sharing their home with and to avoid any surprises at a later point. Similarly, existing parents want to be informed when new children are starting in the knowledge that the new dynamic created by the entry of a new family/child can impact on the routines of the educator’s home and ‘settledness’ of their own child(ren).

Co-ordinators act as advisors, facilitators, decision-makers, mediators and professional support for all parents and educators at the beginning and throughout the care and education arrangement. The majority of parents and educators indicated that they felt empowered through the exchanges of information which occurred and having the opportunity to get to know each other prior to the commencement of care. It appears from the data that both parents and educators, with the support of co-ordinators, felt confident to withdraw from the proposed care and education arrangement if they felt for some reason it was unlikely to work. This decision-making was usually based on intuition. As one educator said:

“It is better to withdraw at this point than to progress in to a relationships where you have doubts about whether it is likely to work”.

Other comments made by parents and educators about the initial stage of the process include:

“Initial contact with the co-ordinators was great. I was more than happy. They’ve continued to be supportive”. (parent)

“Definitely saw it as a two way process where we needed to contribute our thoughts of what would work. I contributed things like “this is his special toy or interests etc. that you can use to settle home”. (parent)

“Having parents or parent and child visit for a few times before child officially starts - it gets them used to the environment and used to other kids that might be there”. (Educator)

For parents the initial communication with co-ordinators and subsequent visits with the educator familiarise them with expectations and routines of the home-based network and educator. In many case strategies are developed together and from an early point in the relationship that are designed to ensure effective linkages between parents and educators. For example it is usual for routines to be negotiated, the diary started, and for toys and familiar items to be transported between home and home-based settings.

The data suggest that parents perceive educators in one of two ways – as ‘expert’ or ‘partner’ and that their view can determine the nature of the ensuing educator/ parent relationship and their level of participation in the settling process. It appears that these views are established in the early stages of the developing relationship and are influenced by the initial interactions between parents and educators. For example those who take the ‘expert’ position tend to leave more of the major decision-making in respect to their child(ren) to the educator and to be less influential/ involved in the detail of the care arrangement than those taking a ‘partnership’ approach. Parents also made comments which suggest that having a recognised early childhood qualification will automatically put an educator into the ‘expert’ category.

Separations and reunions - for parent/s

The research data indicate that parents find the initial separation from their children difficult and that this is often to do with their own feelings and emotions and not about the educator who they usually have confidence in. Within the data on this aspect of the new care arrangement is a theme of ‘fear of the unknown’, related to parents concerns about whether their child will be alright in the care of some one else (especially if they were very young) and whether the nature of the parent/child relationship will change due to having another person involved in caring for them. Similar sentiments were expressed by the parents who participated in Dalli’s (2000) study of settling young children in an early childhood centre.

There was agreement among educators that it can take longer to settle parents than children. Despite educator awareness of the challenges parents face at the time of actual separation, supporting them is an aspect that is difficult for educators to attend to because of the multiple demands on them at arrival and departure times, and especially because the focus they wish to place on settling a new child. Where a child is unsettled educators prefer the new parents to leave quickly as they find it takes longer to settle a child while their parents are on site. To mediate for the difficulty this can cause parents educators generally have a policy of open communication where they invite parents to make contact at anytime. Texting as a communication

medium is increasingly being used, possibly because it is a less intrusive, informal, two-way and a potentially immediate means for educators and parents to stay in contact during the day – although it needs to be carefully managed.

Reunions can be equally anxious time for parents on occasions where a child may not wish to go home with them. Educators seek to minimise the likelihood of this occurring by ensuring that children are ready for parents at ‘pick up’ time and avoiding the introduction of new and exciting activities at these times. Educators also need to be well organised and to be home at expected times.

The confidence of parents in the educator, and their peace of mind about leaving children, is related to how settled children seem and the ease with which they enter the educator’s home each day. Key signals for parents include that expected routines are consistently followed and that the child has a positive relationship with the educator and other children. They are reassured when the child doesn’t cry when they leave, settles quickly and knows the routines. Parents also appreciate knowing that they are welcome to visit the educator’s house at any time during the day. The diary has a key role to play in ensuring open communication between parents and educators and for promoting continuity for children between their home and that of the educator.

Although the initial meeting between parents and co-ordinators is clearly intended to establish the care and education relationship as a business arrangement it is evident that overtime, and as a relationship develops between educators and parents, a blurring of professional and personal boundaries may occur. This happens as the demarcation of business and friendship, including informal babysitting arrangements becomes unclear. In home-based care it is not unusual for parents and educators to form friendships which lead to them meeting, with or without children, outside the formal times of care. While this may create tensions in regard to the business aspects of the care and education arrangement it is also a unique aspect of the home-based model and one which can potentially result in more authentic relationships between key adults and children in a young child’s life.

Implications for the Educators

Relationships and communication are important

The home-based sector takes a community –based approach to the care and education it provides for young children involving a web of close relationships with educators at the centre. This is both a strength and a challenge for co-ordinators and educators as all members of the community contribute in some way to the settling of a new child and his/ her parents. This requires systems and processes that are inclusive of all community members and educators who are flexible, responsive and skilled in managing multiple and diverse demands from adults and children. The key relationships involve the children attending, the parents and families of these children, the educator’s extended family, co-ordinators and connections to other educators and children in the network. It is important to engender a sense of belonging for new families through ensuring connections are made between all participants at an early stage of a new child and their family entering the home-based community centred on the educator’s home

Educators acknowledge that they have a dual focus on parents and children at the outset of a new care arrangement. A key focus for educators is to build positive relationships with parents in the belief that having relationships based on clear communication and mutual respect and trust, transfers to children who will feel more secure about entering the setting. Rosenthal (2000) suggests that it is only when this sort of rapport and trust is established that educators and parents can begin to understand and appreciate each others views, to understand the values on which they are based and that a partnership will develop between the major socialising agents of young children.

While we continue to ponder on the nature of ‘continuity’ as children transition between homes, there is little doubt that to parents and educators in this study this is an important concept, and especially in the initial stages of a new care and education arrangement. The systems and procedures developed by Hutt Family Day Care as part of the ‘matching’ process endeavour to make this a reality. Time is invested by co-ordinators in building relationships and gaining information from prospective parents that is likely to ensure a suitable matching of families and educators. This is a crucial first step in ensuring continuity and linkage between home and home-based service. Educators subsequently spend individual time with parents and their children building on the knowledge already gained by co-ordinators. All parties have agency in this process which is clearly important given the exclusive nature of the one-to-one educator/ parent relationship and the blurring of boundaries between private and public domains that exist in home-based care and education.

Recommendations

A number of areas have emerged from the research, which have the potential to increase our understanding of the home-based context and to enhance the policies, procedures and practices designed to ensure that children and adults experience a positive transition into a home-based setting. Recommended enhancements to the existing ‘matching’ process include:

Policies and practices

- Co-ordinators ensuring there is a clear structure to the meetings which they facilitate between educators and a child’s parents;
- Co-ordinators making additional assistance available to educators when new children start. This will enable educators to more easily manage the competing demands of existing children and the new family, including providing support and guidance for parents in the initial stages of separating from their children;
- Taking a ‘whole’ network approach to the entry process by ensuring that its focus extends beyond the homes of educators’ and parents’ and includes support for young children to familiarise at an early stage with the multiple care and education sites they may be asked to negotiate within a short-time of starting with an educator- timing may be an important aspect in this; and
- Ensuring opportunities are provided for the families of all children connected to the entry of a new child to meet each other at an early stage of the new

relationship. Similar introductions should occur for members of the educators own family.

Research

The research has also identified areas related to young children's transitions in home-based care and education which differ from those of other early childhood education services, about which little is known and that are likely to place additional demands on participants. Recommended areas to explore further include:

- **Multiple transitions** – What is the nature and form of the multiple transitions which occur for young children in the home-based context and how do these affect young children entering home-based care for the first time?;
- **Impact on existing children when a new child enters their small group** - What effect does the introduction of a new child to a home-based setting have on existing relationships and practices in that setting?;
- **Blurred boundaries** - What happens at the point where private and public spheres become blurred in the home-based care context? We pose that while this leads to complexity and compromise from a business perspective the relationships that develop are likely to add to the authenticity of the care experience for young children and their families; and
- **Parents' experience of transition**- parents are key participants in a child's transition to a new setting yet only limited attention is given to understanding the nature of this experience for them.

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APPENDICES