

The peer social world of infants and toddlers during transition into early
childcare settings

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Abstract

Over last few decades, there has been a rapid increase in children, particularly those under two years old, participating in early childcare (ECE) services in New Zealand. At the same time, there is a dearth of research examining supporting young children under the age of two in their first ECE experiences. Of this body of literature, most have examined the role of the adults, with an emphasis on primary caregiver systems. Despite the fact that children of this age engage in dynamic relationships with peers, the significance of peer relationships to children's transition has been largely ignored.

The present thesis aims to address this gap by inquiring into the strategies that transitioning children use to affiliate with the peer group, and in what ways those peers contribute to transitioning children's sense of togetherness in the social group. A qualitative inquiry was undertaken wherein video footage and observations were recorded of two very young children transitioning into an ECE; with their interactions with peers being observed especially. The children's teacher was also interviewed. The findings were interpreted through a symbolic interactionist lens and themes were coded iteratively. Although the data were mostly treated qualitatively, some themes are presented using descriptive statistics.

The findings showed that the two transitioning children were intrinsically interested in their peers. They were motivated to participate in peer-related activities by using specific strategies such as passing toys, showing humour, being close, and making physical contact. However, at times the peer group resisted these two newcomers and their 'initial entry' into the group. The transitioning children demonstrated strong resilience and perseverance. The

process of peer rejection, peer acceptance, and social negotiation went in a circular form rather than in time order. In other words, there was no clear linear trajectory towards their acceptance into the peer group. Even when others had begun to interact with the transitioning children, there were still instances of rejection.

In addition, this present thesis discusses some useful strategies for practitioners to facilitate a smooth and positive transition experience for infants and toddlers with support from social peers. It is my hope that practitioners can benefit from this study.

Key words: infants and toddlers, transition, early childcare, peer interaction, sense of belonging, togetherness, socio-emotional wellbeing, ethnography, insider research

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The present thesis investigates how the peer relations of infants and toddlers contribute to their socio-emotional well-being or sense of affiliative togetherness during the transition from home to a teacher-led early childcare centre (ECE, not including kindergarten, home-based, and Kōhanga Reo).

In terms of this research, ethnography was adopted to explore how very young transitioning children make sense of social working theories, form social understandings, develop social rules in a group, construct peer culture, and foster a sense of togetherness with their peers through ongoing peer social interactions which take place on a daily basis. Field observation was conducted with the participation of two transitioning infants along with their interactive peers who were all under three years old. Each main transitioning participant was observed for four weeks and their social interactions with peers were documented in quantitative and qualitative forms, with the use of self-designed observation schedule, digital footage, and written significant vignettes. Since this research also examined effective strategies that adults can use to scaffold the affiliation of a transitioning child to the social group, the primary care teacher of two transitioning children was invited to participate in two semi-structured interviews at the end of the observation period for each transitioning child. Data from these multiple sources were cross-examined and analysed.

This thesis consists of five chapters. In Chapter 1, I will elaborate rationale of my present research and outline the significance of conducting such a study with a focus on the youngest children, aged under two years in an ECE setting. The theoretical frame and methodologies of this thesis will be introduced in Chapter 2, followed by Chapter 3 where the

findings will be presented. I will also discuss two main themes emerging from the data in Chapter 4. The rest of the thesis states the limitations and contributions of this thesis, along with a brief summary.

1.1. Rationale of this research

The number of children participating in ECE is large and growing yearly in New Zealand, which means that any problem facing children in ECE is experienced by a significant number. Given the growing number of women in the labour force and the appearance of nuclear family structures, particularly in Western society, more children under school age are enrolled in early learning services. In the recent two decades, the number of children participating in early childcare is increasing in New Zealand. According to the 2020 ECE census results from the Ministry of Education, the total enrolment number of children under five years old has increased from over 153,000 in 2000 to reach a peak at over 200,000 in 2017. Although the number dropped slightly afterwards, the number of children enrolling in ECE is still large. There are over 190,000 children younger than five enrolled in early childcare in 2020. Among these young children, over one third are infants and toddlers under two years old with a total number of more than 73,000 (Ministry of Education, 2020).

One problem that children face is how to transition into their ECE setting. When infants and toddlers come to an early childcare centre from home for the first time, transition is a critical stage for them to go through. It is not only arguably one of the first times they leave their intimate home primary carers but also one of the first times they have participated in group life and are starting their social journey with strangers in an unfamiliar environment. In this circumstance, it is common for infants and toddlers to experience separation anxiety from adjustment without home primary caregivers (Bernard, Peloso, Laurenceau, Zhang, &

Dozier, 2015; Ereky-Stevens, Funder, Katschnig, Malmberg, & Datler, 2018; Fein, Gariboldi, & Boni, 1993). Therefore, it is of importance to nurture their social and emotional well-being during this critical period.

Assisting the transition of infants and toddlers is also crucial for their families as parents are often found to have strong negative feelings towards their young children's transition experience. Many parents feel sad, anxious, guilty, helpless, disturbed, and upset about sending their children to early learning services at a young age regardless of their reasons (Chiligiris, 2015; Dalli, 1999; Degotardi & Pearson, 2014). Indubitably, it would be a relief for them to see their children participate in social group life with a smooth start. Therefore, assisting children's very first transition from home care to out-of-home care is critical and meaningful to young children and their families.

1.2. Significance of this research

The vision for all children growing up in New Zealand is clearly stated in *Te Whāriki*, a national early childhood curriculum in New Zealand. It states that children should become “competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging...” (Ministry of Education, 2017, p.5). Therefore, belonging is one of the strands which interweaves the *Whāriki* – “a mat for all to stand on” (p.10). Furthermore, socio-emotional competence has become an increasing focus for the Ministry of Education, as evidenced in its recent publication, *He Mapuna te Tamaiti* (Ministry of Education, 2019), which sets out expectations that teachers will assist children to build friendships and find a sense of belonging within groups.

In *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) and *Early Learning 10-year strategic plan* (Ministry of Education, 2019), specific requirements and strategies were given to teachers to work in cooperation with parents to facilitate a smooth transition for children. To date, most strategies focus only on adult-child relationships or teacher-parent relationships only. Many ECE centres in New Zealand have developed a well-functioning adult-oriented support system for children and their families with regards to settling into their ECE. The settling system includes but is not limited to a key teacher/primary caregiver system, preliminary home visit, settling visit, and daily communication sheets. The presence of teachers is regarded as a determining factor in the transition experience that infants and toddlers go through (Ahnert, Gunnar, Lamb, & Barthel, 2004; Dalli, 1999; Ereky-Stevens, Funder, Katschnig, Malmberg, & Datler, 2018; Zhang, 2011).

Although a primary caregiving system enables teachers to accommodate transitioning children's physical and emotional needs in ECE, there is limited information to support teachers to settle very young children into a peer group social life. As a registered teacher in New Zealand for four years, I have not only witnessed many infants and toddlers struggling to adjust themselves into a new care environment, but I also feel confused, as many other teachers in my networks do, about how to better enable children's social development in a smooth transition. Although there are many references to 'transition' in the extant research and governmental documents (for example, see Growing up in New Zealand reports). These references refer to transition as the experience of moving from preschool to primary school. Knowledge about supporting the transition of infants and toddlers in ECE for the first time remains elusive. Technically, transitioning from home to an early childcare centre is the first time that infants and toddlers officially start their social life in an out-of-home context

(Ministry of Education, 2017). This transition experience is equally critical as that occur at later stages. However, it has been overlooked by academics for many years.

The few studies which investigated children's transitioning experience from home to early childcare centre focused primarily on the crucial influence of adults upon children's adjustment (for example, see Christie, 2010; Danby, Thompson, Theobald, & Thorpe, 2012). Parents, meanwhile, are also mostly making judgements of the quality of their children's transition based on children's relationship with their teachers at early childcare centres (Chiligiris, 2015; Dalli, 1999; Degotardi & Pearson, 2014). In addition, under current regulations, the ratio for teachers and children under two is one teacher to every five children (Ministry of Education, 2019). It is likely to be challenging for teachers to focus on one transitioning child while they also have to cater the needs of other children in the group. Still, little guideline or training is provided to teachers to turn these peer interactions into teachable moments and facilitate young children's transition.

Although children under two years old heavily rely on their teachers to satisfy their needs, their group life is not only about interaction with adults. Peer interaction also plays a vital role in children's social life in a group context (Danby, Thompson, Theobald, & Thorpe, 2012). For years, it has been widely acknowledged in literature that peer relations have great value on one's growth and development at different stages of life. Exploration of early peer social interaction, however, is surprisingly overlooked (Corsaro, 2018; Rossetti-Ferreira, Moraes, Oliveira, Campos-de-Carvalho, & Amorim, 2011). Although very young children show great social ability in communicating with their parental caregivers with rich facial expressions and body language, they also have competence in social exchanges with peers (Corsaro, 2018; Engdahl, 2011; Rossetti-Ferreira, Moraes, Oliveira, Campos-de-Carvalho, &

Amorim, 2011). Theorists and researchers have long argued the significant influence of peer culture for older children; however, are contemporaneously increasingly curious about what impact the peer group has on these much younger children. The presence of the trend coincidentally aligns with the growing number of young children enrolled in early learning services in Western society (Rossetti-Ferreira, Moraes, Oliveira, Campos-de-Carvalho, & Amorim, 2011; Singer, 2002). Thus, the present study focused on very young children's peer interactions during their first transitions into ECE settings. The following section outlines the key concepts and definitions used when selecting relevant literature and framing the study.

1.3. Definitions

As meanings of terms vary in studies, often reflecting different cultural and societal contexts, it is necessary to develop consistency in the concepts and terminology used in the present thesis and to provide clear definitions of them in order to frame the study and give it coherence.

Infants and toddlers: Generally, 'infants' and 'toddlers' refer to young children who are under three years old. According to MoE of New Zealand (Ministry of Education, n.d.), the age of an infant ranges from birth to 18 months while a toddler's age range is approximately between 1 and 3 years. However, most infants in New Zealand stay in home care for the first six months and only start in a teacher-led early childcare centre after that due to the paid parental leave from the government. Therefore, infants and toddlers discussed in this present research are specifically referred to as very young children from six months to three years old.

Early childcare centres: In New Zealand, formal licensed centre-based early childhood education services are categorised into public kindergarten, Kōhanga Reo, Pacific Island early childhood centre, home-based care, playcentre, and other early childcare centres. In the extant literature, other early childcare centres may also be known as ‘education and care’, ‘early childcare centre/service’, ‘teacher-led early childcare centre/service’, and ‘centre-based daycare’. Since predominantly 69% of children attend other early childcare centres in New Zealand in 2020 (Ministry, 2020), ‘early childcare centres’ in this present research refers specifically to those operated by individuals, private organisations or operated in a form of community-based organisations. These ECE centres offer all day or sessional teacher-led services for children below the lawful school age of six-years-old.

Transition: Ministry of Education in New Zealand defines transition as an experience of young children moving into an unfamiliar environment that “involves forming new relationships, roles and responsibilities, and spans of time between preparing for the move to a new environment, to when the child and family/whānau are more fully established members of the new community” (Ministry of Education, 2020, para.1). In the latest *Early Learning Action Plan* (Ministry of Education, 2019), ‘transition’ has a more specific meaning which takes place “between home and an early learning service, within early learning services, and between early learning services and schools and kura” (p. 18). For this research, ‘transition’ specifically refers to the process of a child adjusting from home into a teacher-led early childcare centre for the first time.

Peers: According to the Cambridge Online Dictionary, ‘peer’ means ‘a person who is the same age or has the same social position or the same abilities as other people in a group’ (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). To be more contextualized, the definition of ‘peer’ in this

research adopted the definition given by Taylor and Workman (2018), “individuals who generally share social characteristics such as age, social background and status” (p.216).

Peer social interaction: According to Hatch (1986), ‘Children involved in these interactions enjoyed the attention and affirmative responses of peers...They appeared to gain satisfaction from being engaged with others in social exchanges even when there was no apparent substance to their communications’ (p.308). Therefore, ‘peer social interaction’ in this research is defined as children’s intentional interactive social interchanges where there are specific senders and receivers. These reciprocal interactions include but are not limited to touching body/toys in hand, observing peers, eye contact with peers, responding to peers with facial expressions or body language, hugging, verbal communication, playing with peers mutually, passing props to or taking props from peers, and play.

1.4. Literature review

1.4.1. Peer social interaction

1.4.1.1 Settings in which infants’ and toddlers’ peer social interactions are typically studied

Initially, investigations of toddlers’ peer social interaction observed children in a home setting (for example, see Ross, 1982 and Rubenstein & Howes, 1976). Gradually, investigations were primarily conducted in laboratory contexts in order to mitigate the great influence of the familiarity of a home environment on children’s performance in research (Corsaro, 2018). However, it is now believed that observations conducted in these two specific settings are unable to reflect the true sophistication of peer social interchanges as children are having to simultaneously relate to an unfamiliar environment as well as navigate

the complexities of interacting with others. Young children might have completely different social reactions to peer social partners at home with the presence of their family caregivers or in laboratory settings than at early childcare services without parental care (Rossetti-Ferreira, Moraes, Oliveira, Campos-de-Carvalho, & Amorim, 2011). Thus, in recent years, it has become more common to observe young children's social interactions with peers in a group care surrounding, particularly since there is an increased number of infants and toddlers being cared in formal group care services nowadays (Bukowski, Buhrmester, & Underwood, 2011).

1.4.1.2 Intrinsic social motivation in peer interaction

In 1995, Harris (1995) developed a theory of group socialisation emphasising that children's social learning takes place in a group context with great peer influence. This theory challenged the traditional assumption that parents or family is the sole influencing factor in children's social development. On the contrary, peer influence arises when one grows older (Harris, 1995).

For a long period, older children are recognised as active social members. Children who are over two are widely acknowledged to have competence to engage in mutual social activities and respond accordingly (Boldermo, 2020; Bukowski, Buhrmester, & Underwood, 2011). Despite the fact that social needs and social ability of infants are acknowledged in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) and the publication of *He Mapuna te Tamaiti* (Ministry of Education, 2019) draws great attention to the socio-emotional competence of this age group, there is little literature focused on the sociability of those under two, especially that specifically focused on the period of transitioning from home to group care for the first time.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) proposed a hypothesis that, driven by an intrinsic urge, infants tend to demonstrate a need to seek for playmates through social interaction from a six-month-old age (as cited in Løkken, 2000, p.172). In recent years, there is growing evidence that children are intrinsically active and competent social agents in peer interaction at a very young age (Bukowski, Buhrmester, & Underwood, 2011; Corsaro, 2018; Corsaro, 2005; Degotardi & Pearson, 2014; Engdahl, 2011; Rossetti-Ferreira, Moraes, Oliveira, Campos-de-Carvalho, & Amorim, 2011). While engaging with peers, those under two are able to use a wide variety of interactive skills such as facial expressions, body gestures, and physical body contacts to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and emotions without language (Bukowski, Buhrmester, & Underwood, 2011). In a study conducted in an early childcare centre in Brazil, empirical evidence has also proved the capability of infants showing empathy and competence in shared play (Rossetti-Ferreira, Moraes, Oliveira, Campos-de-Carvalho, & Amorim, 2011). In the study of Sumsion and Goodfellow (2012), a 14-month-old child approached an older child and socially engaged with the latter with rich body languages during observation period. Such proactive social gestures were interpreted as a sophisticated social strategy to foster affiliation with peers in group life. Children instinctively enjoy having company from agemates and the feeling of being together (Engdahl, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2017).

The results from this research highly resonated with the theory that very young children are capable of sophisticated sociability. Findings of the present research showed that infants are not only curious about peers who share the same immediate environment with them, but are also intrinsically motivated to make contact with them on many occasions. Peer interactions between young children especially those going through the transitioning period

often start from watching and then gradually go beyond that and mutual interactions are captured as time passed. More details are revealed in the chapters of Findings and Discussion.

1.4.1.3 The importance of peer social interaction

In a group-care ECE setting, social interchange with peers in meaningful social contexts is an essential attribute to infants' acquisition of social skills (Corsaro, 2018; Degotardi & Pearson, 2014; Engdahl, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2019; Ministry of Education, 2017). More evidence has shown that children's exposure to peer-related social interaction at a young age is closely associated with their personality, socio-emotional development, cognitive development, and adjustment at different stages of life (Brown, Odom, & Buysse, 2002; Bukowski, Buhrmester, & Underwood, 2011; Sandseter & Seland, 2018). In other words, the benefits of peer social interaction are multi-faceted.

First, the Group Socialisation theory proposed that peers have a great influence on children's personality development (Harris, 1995). To challenge the conventional nature assumption theory, Harris (1995) compared a large number of studies which had a focus on the personality characteristics of identical twins. Surprisingly, while approximately half the variance is comprised of genes that these adult identical twins shared, the shared within-home environment accounts for zero to ten percentage only (Harris, 1995). Despite the 20% measurement error, there is 40% to 50% of variation remained unexplained. Through reviewing a vast amount of literature, Harris (1995) proposed that it is very likely that the unexplained variation of children's personality characteristics is related to the peer environment. Once children are in a peer-oriented environment and have less contact with parents, the family influence decreases. Meanwhile, their personalities are considerably

affected by members, norms, and values of the peer social group in the process of socialisation (Harris, 1995).

Second, another positive outcome of peer social interaction is its impact on children's socio-emotional development, according to the national curriculum of New Zealand *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) and *He Mapuna te Tamaiti* (Ministry of Education, 2019). Infants' social learning starts at the very beginning of life with scaffolding from their adult caregivers (Corsaro, 2018; Dalli, 2003; Engdahl, 2011; Rossetti-Ferreira, Moraes, Oliveira, Campos-de-Carvalho, & Amorim, 2011; Trevarthen, 1992). Findings showed that very young children's social engagement tends to be more adult-oriented in ECE (Legendre & Munchenbach, 2011). However, as children grow, they are also driven by intrinsic desire to make contact with peers especially after they are able to distinguish social connections with significant caregivers from those with peers (Degotardi & Pearson, 2014). From the foundation of adult-child relationship they develop previously, peers are seen as appealing playmates to young children.

According to the symbolic interactionism theory of Blumer (1969) which is adopted as the theoretical frame for this research, the way that one is treated by others not only lays a solid foundation to one's self-perception, but also determines one's emotional and social responses to others. In *Te Whāriki* (2017), the definition of Principle 4 - Relationship "Children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places and things" (p.21) illustrated the important influence of relationships on young children's growth. While children are cared and learn in an ECE environment, their social engagement with peers constructs an important part of their social life (Ahnert, Rickert, Lamb, & Dannemiller, 2000; Goodfellow, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2017). However, engaging peers who are at

the same developmental level as oneself is difficult as young children are not yet fully capable to take into consideration the developmental stage of their social partners (Hay, Payne, & Chadwick, 2004). For this reason, interacting with peers in a socially appropriate manner is more challenging than it appears.

While young children are enthusiasts of social experiences, peer conflict is often seen between young children and their peers especially in a group-care context. It is only seen as positive to young children's social learning until recently (Clarke, McLaughlin, & Aspden, 2019). Peer conflict provides young children the learning opportunities to nurture their socio-emotional development in a mutual responsive context. While engaging peers in interactive social experiences, it is important for children to not only express their needs in a socially appropriate manner, but also read the meanings behind the cues of peers correctly (Clarke, McLaughlin, & Aspden, 2019; Ministry of Education, 2017). Emotion regulation, therefore, is essential for children to test their own working theories, assert opinions, take perspectives of others, address conflicts, and solve problems while interacting with peers (Carpendale & Lewis, 2004; Clarke, McLaughlin, & Aspden, 2019; Degotardi & Pearson, 2014; Hay, Payne, & Chadwick, 2004; Ladd, 2005). This process facilitates children's behavioural regulation, enriches their social understanding, and fosters their ability to distinguish their own and others' inner feelings, which is of importance for their social development and socialisation (Carpendale & Lewis, 2004; Clarke, McLaughlin, & Aspden, 2019; Degotardi & Pearson, 2014; Engdahl, 2011; Hay, Payne, & Chadwick, 2004; Ladd, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2019; Ministry of Education, 2017). These social experiences also contribute to children's social identity in the peer group (Ladd, 2005).

Third, participating in peer interaction at an early age is beneficial to children's cognitive development. Vygotsky (1978) developed a theory of the zone of proximal development to account for the skills that one person is almost but not yet able to master by oneself at one stage. Such skills, however, are possibly able to be mastered when one is assisted by more knowledgeable and experienced others such as adults or peers (Vygotsky, 1978). To examine this theory, 125 Australian year-two students who were mainly Caucasian and from five socio-economically advantaged primary schools were invited to participate in experiments where they were divided into groups to complete problem-solving tasks (Fawcett & Garton, 2005). Experimental statistics revealed that the group of children working with collaboration scored higher than the other group in which children who were working individually. In a more specific context, children who were allowed to negotiate outperformed those who were asked to collaborate without talking. Furthermore, results showed that those children who worked with more capable partners performed better than those who were paired with partners who are at the same or lower cognitive level (Fawcett & Garton, 2005).

When young children are living a group life, they are exposed to intensive peer social exchanges for the large amount of time they spend on interactions with peers. Positive unique social experience with more capable peers stimulates young children to acquire knowledge, master skills, and develop working theories through collaboration, negotiation, co-construction, and problem-solving (Bukowski, Buhrmester, & Underwood, 2011). Children's cognitive development is strengthened when they practice these skills in peer group repeatedly over time. Piaget (1932) believed that young children learn to take different points of views of others through negotiation in play where opinions are exchanged.

Lastly, peer relationship is a great influential factor to one's adjustment at different stages of life. It is evident in longitudinal studies that the absence of peer relationship is positively associated with one's struggling adjustment throughout the entire lifetime (Brown, Odom, & Buysse, 2002; Bukowski, Buhrmester, & Underwood, 2011). According to the theory of peer socialisation of Harris (1995), peer influence is more powerful at the stage of youth.

Evidence from studies carried out worldwide including Finland, Hongkong, Singapore, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Germany has proved that the lack of peer social experience in preschool age affects children's sense of security, social competence and social skills learning; as a result, it discourages their adjustment to primary school (Ahtola, et al., 2011; Chan, 2010; Clarke & Sharpe, 2003; Coie, Lochman, Terry, & Hyman, 1992; Dockett & Perry, 2004; Griebel & Niesel, 2003). These children are often lacking self-regulation and have difficulty in concentration, which affects their academic achievement (Ahtola, et al., 2011; Chan, 2010; Clarke & Sharpe, 2003; Coie, Lochman, Terry, & Hyman, 1992; Dockett & Perry, 2004; Griebel & Niesel, 2003).

The influence of peer relationship on one's adjustment to a new environment also extends to the stage of adolescence. To investigate the relations between peer influence and adjustment of adolescents, 238 primary seniors and intermediate juniors from one public school and four private schools in the United States were invited to participate in research (Waldrip, Malcolm, & Jensen-Campbell, 2008). It is clearly shown in evidence that, compared to adolescents who have a higher score of peer acceptance, those who are rejected by peers are more likely to have problems in adjustment at school when other major influencing factors are in control (Waldrip, Malcolm, & Jensen-Campbell, 2008). Literature

has shown that, since these adolescents are marginalised or involved in bullying at school, it is likely they have poor performance in interpersonal relationship, employment, financial status, familyhood, and public services when they get older. The worst can be ending up in gang violence, suicidality, and criminality (Copeland, Wolke, Angold, & Costello, 2013; Wolke, Copeland, Angold, & Costello, 2013).

1.4.2. Peer culture

1.4.2.1 Definition of peer culture

According to Corsaro (2000), the definition of peer culture is ‘a stable set of activities or routines, artefacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers’ (p.92).

1.4.2.2 How peer culture is formed?

Peer culture is formed, maintained, and shaped collectively by everyone in the social group as opposed to individually. At the beginning of children’s group life, it is common to see solitary play; however, it is often gradually replaced by emerging parallel play over time as young children’s strong tendency to initiate social contacts with peers and to become a member of play groups (Corsaro & Eder, 1990). Due to such social demands in a group context, children develop corresponding sophisticated strategies to merge themselves into play groups. While children are involved in play activities with peers in a group context, they show great autonomy to initiate social interactions in a similar way that adults do. For instance, Corsaro (2018) reported that while children attempt to participate in a group play, they tend to sit near the group to begin with, pay close attention to the whole group and each group member, and ultimately seek for opportunities to gain access to play. This is seen as a

sophisticated imitation to the social strategy that adults frequently use in various public social events. As reported by Degotardi and Pearson (2014), observing peers and looking for close physical distance are two strong indicators to demonstrate young children's emerging interest to others who are at a similar age and share the same care environment. Findings of this research highly resonated with this theory. Further navigation in this theory is provided in the chapter of Discussion.

According to Vygotsky's constructivist perspective, children construct social meanings, norms, values, and cultural systems by means of interactive contacts with peers in various daily events (Corsaro & Eder, 1990; Corsaro, 2018; Theobald, Bateman, Busch, Laraghy, & Danby, 2016). After years of study and close observation of pre-schoolers from three to six years old, Corsaro (2018) observed that young children construct their own peer culture in a manner named 'interpretive reproduction'. At home, young children observe the ways of adults using social skills in interaction. After children leave home and participate in group life of early learning services where they meet their agemates, they embark on a journey of experiencing differences, and constructing their own peer culture with creative reproduction in collective actions (Boldermo, 2020; Corsaro & Eder, 1990). During social exchanges, children are empowered to apply the knowledge and skills that they acquire from adults to agemates who share the same social context with them. This process goes further than simple imitation; they demonstrate autonomy to develop their own social working theories through reproducing, repurposing, and reconstructing social meanings in their own social group (Corsaro, 2000).

Dramatic play, popular among toddlers and pre-schoolers, is the most common event for children to construct their own peer culture. In one of the studies of Corsaro (2012), four

pre-schoolers vividly presented their social understanding of family structure, roles, and relationship between family members in their dramatic play. One boy and one girl initiated a dramatic play in which their roles were husband and wife. By conforming to their roles, they shared an understanding of a traditional family structure in the adult world. They also validated their roles when they decided the husband would move furniture while the wife cleaned the floor. Another two boys pretended to be kittens and approached the “family”. When they were refused entry to the “house” by the husband and wife as they were busy and kittens were supposed to stay in the backyard, one of the boys claimed he was no longer a cat but another husband. The “wife” disagreed with this idea as she cannot marry two husbands. However, when she failed to convince the boys there were not two husbands in one household, she creatively solved the problem to continue their play by pretending to be a cat (Corsaro, 2012).

From here, it is clear to see that these children have a shared understanding of their roles and the relationship of each role in this play. Their actions were decided by their interpretation of their roles as husband and wife living in and cleaning their house, and that kittens should stay outside while the family is busy. Obviously, they apply social knowledge that they gain from adults to make sense of their social world. However, when complex relationships emerged, they addressed the problem that might impede their game with creativity and great problem-solving skills. Through reproducing the social meanings and social understandings, children construct their culture with the presence and engagement of peers (Corsaro, 2012).

Confirming identity in play group is another phenomenon of children reproducing social strategies to adapt to their unique peer culture (Corsaro & Eder, 1990). While it is rare

to see adults confirming their social relationship with others directly and in public, children are often seen to be asking their peers if they are friends as a way to affirm their social identity and social position among the peer group (Corsaro, 2018).

As pointed out previously, there is an increasing number of under twos who are being cared for by teachers in early childhood setting. It is found in this age group that they autonomously and collectively contribute to achieve goals and construct their own peer culture. In a study of children's use of rituals, a group of toddlers were observed to succeed in requesting yogurt by collective action (Mortlock, 2015). After a toddler who played a leader's role in the peer group asked for yogurt, other babies interpreted this action as a signal for a group action and they followed to ask for yogurt. However, instead of eating yogurt, the leader mischievously took off her bib and this action was quickly followed by her followers at the same lunch table. Children foster a strong sense of emotional satisfaction from being part of group or socially involving in play. Such positive emotional feeling reinforces children's motivation to 'do things together' (Corsaro, 2018, p.164). Mortlock (2015) pointed out that these toddlers not only achieved their goal of requesting yogurt as a team, but also developed their peer culture of togetherness by repetitively performing such collective actions in mealtimes.

1.4.3. Friendship

1.4.3.1 Definition of friendship

As noted previously, children are not only active agents in initiating social contacts with peers at an early age, they also show distinctive social preference for whom they desire to play with (Keddie, 2004). Therefore, friends are defined as "children who enjoy and prefer

playing together” (Howes, 1983). This means the special bonding relationship that is shared between friends is, at some level, exclusive to others who are out of the friend circle but still in the larger group. Such exclusiveness in children’s play is also pointed out in a study by Corsaro (2018). It is true that children enjoy seeking play partners to share mutual interests, to enrich their social experience, and to construct their unique social world in collective action; however, once group members form a solid relationship with each other, they tend to prevent others from entering their interactive space (Corsaro, 2018).

Therefore, Corsaro (2018) defined friendship specifically as “producing shared activities together in a specific area and protecting that play from the intrusions of others” (p.169). Also, friends are expected to understand each other’s inner feelings and thoughts, and to be reliable to be sought for help when there are social and mental problems (Damon, as cited in Corsaro, 1985, p.167). Although such friendship may only appear among older children, Corsaro (1985) also proposed that those young children who are exposed to in-depth and consistent peer social experiences may develop an understanding of friendship at an earlier age than those who are not.

1.4.3.2 Importance of friendship to children’s development

It is believed that the most ubiquitous form of relationship at different stages of one’s life is friendship (Bukowski, Buhrmester, & Underwood, 2011). Since children feel a sense of ‘being together’ in friendship, this provides children with emotional support, especially in a context where there is no presence of parents or other intimate family members, such as early learning services and school. With support from companionship, children are more likely to show a positive attitude to school life and peers; as a result, they receive positive and wider peer acceptance at school. Therefore, having friends is of value to children’s adjustment from

a familiar context to a new environment. Statistics indicated that young children's continuity of friendship from preschool is significantly related to their settling to primary school as they showed greater social skills and academic achievement, and less anti-social behaviours, despite the complexity of adjustment (Kay, 2002). The relation of reciprocal friendship and school adjustment carries on to the age of adolescence (Berndt, Hawkins, & Jiao, 1999; Berndt & Keefe, 1995; Wentzel, Barry, & Caldwell, 2004).

Evidence also indicated that the quality of students' friendships is positively associated with their adjustment at school (Engle, McElwain, & Lasky, 2011; Hartup, 1996; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996; Waldrup, Malcolm, & Jensen-Campbell, 2008). To examine the relation of the quality of children's friendship and their adjustment, 289 boys and 278 girls at preschool across the United States were recruited to participate in a longitudinal research (Engle, McElwain, & Lasky, 2011). These participants were divided into four groups which are no friend, low quality, average quality, and high-quality friend based on preliminary assessment from their families with regard to their friendship status. With demographic characteristics controlled, statistics evidence indicated that the quality of children's friendships is significantly related to their social behaviours and strategies. While children who struggled with no friend or low quality friendships tend to show more problematic behaviours, those who enjoy great friendship showed greater social competence of adjusting into school life (Engle, McElwain, & Lasky, 2011). This result is consistent with the study of Waldrup, Malcolm, and Jensen-Campbell (2008) in which adolescents participated.

While children who have higher friendship quality or have greater social support from friends tend to have a higher school involvement after the onset of schooling, those having

conflicts with friends showed a lower willingness to participate in school (Hartup, 1996; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996). Furthermore, the effect of friendship is reinforced as children grow. In a three-year longitudinal research, Powers and Bierman (2013) collected data from over 4000 American preschool children from 27 schools in four demographically diverse cities. With control of variables of genders and socio-economic status, participants were recruited at preschool age and were followed in observation from the onset of primary school to the third grade of primary school. Results are consistent with prior literature that, due to the absence of positive friend support, children who show aggressiveness at the first year are prone to develop friendships with other aggressive peers at the second grade. Such friendships, as a result, generated more antisocial behaviours in the following year (Powers & Bierman, 2013).

From studies presented above, it is clear to see that there is a great body of literature that has studied the friendship of pre-schoolers and older children at school over time. However, it should also be noticed that the studies of friendships mainly focus on older children whilst younger children's friendship is overlooked (Degotardi & Pearson, 2014). There is an increasing number of young children are cared in a group care setting nowadays. Such group care provides young children with a communal space to discern similarity that they share with peers. From this discovering process, attachment, affection, and friendship evolves at an early age (Degotardi & Pearson, 2014).

1.4.4. A sense of togetherness

1.4.4.1 Definition of togetherness

Studies concerning children's sense of belonging, togetherness, and affiliation is relatively recent (Boldermo, 2020), therefore, limited literature can be found on this issue (but see (Boldermo, 2020; Hännikäinen, 2007; Hännikäinen, 1999; Koivula & Hännikäinen, 2017; Mortlock, 2015; Rayna, 2001; Van Oers & Hännikäinen, 2001). These studies are mainly conducted in Nordic countries and in Europe, with an exception being the study of Mortlock which was conducted in a New Zealand context.

'Togetherness' often relates to positive feelings such as the sense of belongingness, affection, and affiliative membership, a bonding relationship, and identity in groups (Hännikäinen, 2007; Van Oers & Hännikäinen, 2001). However, 'togetherness' is a complex terminology and it can also be built upon conflict, tension, and disagreement between the person with other group members while the person is simultaneously intending to maintain membership and be together with the group (Van Oers & Hännikäinen, 2001). Therefore, togetherness is described as being involved in mutual activities with the presence of other group members (Van Oers & Hännikäinen, 2001). Meanwhile, it is also a 'feeling of emotional interconnectedness between children' (Koivula & Hännikäinen, 2017, p.127). This definition is adopted in this research.

1.4.4.2 Is togetherness the same as friendship?

A sense of togetherness among young children is a rather new concept which has only recently been differentiated from the concept of friendship (Van Oers & Hännikäinen, 2001). Friendship relates to strong personal social affection, reciprocal emotional support, mutual understanding, intimacy, loyalty, trust, and sharing (Ladd, 2005). However, togetherness commonly and widely emerges from affiliative behaviours to the group which is visible at various occasions and events. Within the group, there are sub-groups such as dyads and triads,

which are described as affiliative structures by Løkken (2000). In these affiliative structures, children show interest, social needs, and social literacy in interactions with other group members, but it does not necessarily mean that they are forming friendship. As outlined in the study of Boldermo (2020), the concept of togetherness is more related to belonging, membership and emotional connection to the peer group. In other words, togetherness is a process of different minds exchanging perspectives, feeling, and intentions on the basis of mutual emotional affiliation and a sense of belonging. Children communicating innate feelings and needs with peers leads to collective understandings and actions (Degotardi, 2014; Rayna, 2001).

1.4.4.3 How infants and toddlers develop a sense of togetherness

Very few studies have sought to understand how peer togetherness is fostered by infants and toddlers. This section discusses the few studies available. Infants and toddlers develop a sense of togetherness during daily care in four main ways including joint play, reciprocal interaction, individual influence, and peer talk (Boldermo, 2020; De Haan & Singer, 2001; Hännikäinen, 2007; Hännikäinen, 1999; Koivula & Hännikäinen, 2017; Rayna, 2001; Van Oers & Hännikäinen, 2001).

Aiming to explore togetherness in a peer group setting, Boldermo (2020) conducted a case study in which fieldwork and data analysis were carried out with comprehensive societal, institutional, and individual perspectives. Observation was conducted with a group of two-year-old children from a refugee family background in a multicultural early childcare centre in Norway in 2018. It was evident that those children demonstrated an awareness and ability in negotiation in membership and togetherness in social group (Boldermo, 2020). It is reported that while some toddlers negotiated for their participation in play, other children

maintained and reinforced their advantageous positions in peer social hierarchies by exclusion in many forms such as sending exclusive birthday invitation, setting boundaries for roles in dramatic play, and limiting access to toys from home (Boldermo, 2020). However, it is in this negotiating process, toddlers make meaning of their social experience and develop their social learning (Boldermo, 2020). From this perspective, peer social interactions are fleeting exchanges of emotional sharing (Koivula & Hännikäinen, 2017).

In children's shared play, ritual and symbolic props are often used to draw a line between togetherness and otherness (Boldermo, 2020). When observing a group of two-year-old participant in a natural group care setting, Boldermo (2020) found that birthday party invitations were frequently used as a ritual to create the concept of membership (Boldermo, 2020). Children who gained access to those real or imagined birthday parties could easily feel a sense of belonging and inclusiveness in peer group; while those who were blocked from participation could understand that they are not part of the group. Such negotiation skills, pointed out by Boldermo (2020), are ongoing, and are deeply influenced by the peer culture in the setting. Furthermore, toys that children brought from home are also skilfully used as symbols to construct and maintain togetherness and otherness in group (Boldermo, 2020). The power of ownership of these toys may intensify inclusiveness and exclusiveness in group as owners get to decide who has access to these toys.

Togetherness is also built upon reciprocal interaction when children are emotionally affiliated. According to Boldermo (2020), providing help and support is one of the characteristics of togetherness of young children. Living in a group-care environment, young children learn to distinguish their own feelings and motivations from one another through peer interactions and develop prosocial disposition such as empathy, which strengthened their

sense of belonging to peers and the group (Boldermo, 2020; Degotardi & Pearson, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2019). This is captured in the research of Rayna (2001) who observed a boy and a girl who were at their second year of life. When the girl noticed the boy was crying after having a wooden truck fall on his head, she consoled the boy persistently with many approaches until the boy stopped crying. Rayna (2001) believed that such comforting gestures were motivated by the emotional connection that the girl shared with the boy when she learned that he was hurt. At that moment, they were socially and emotionally connected despite the fact that there was no sign of friendship between them.

Rayna (2001) also found that children tend to share more of their emotional affiliation in joint activities. In her study, a group of three-year-old was invited to participate in self-directed puppet shows. It was reported that children who manipulated those puppets constantly switched and modified their emotions, reactions, and behaviours along the characters, storylines, and settings (Rayna, 2001). During the puppet show, children feel that they are together, and they belong to the same group.

Children can also feel a sense of belonging to a peer group through individual influence (Koivula & Hännikäinen, 2017; Mortlock, 2015). In her study, Mortlock (2015) described how a group of under twos was encouraged by their leader and requested yogurt from the teacher through their collective actions. The leader's individual influence is powerful as it makes those peers who joined this action feel they are doing things together. In addition, the absence of adults' participation in the group action was classified as another concept called 'otherness' (Mortlock, 2015). It is suggested that such otherness also strengthened the togetherness among the toddlers unintentionally (Mortlock, 2015).

Linguistically, the use of “we” in toddlers who are capable of communicating verbally also demonstrated their intrinsic social desire with peers (Corsaro, 2018). The use of such inclusive pronouns also facilitates children’s sense of togetherness or sameness in shared group life (De Haan & Singer, 2001; Van Oers & Hännikäinen, 2001). When older children say, for example, ‘We are the authors of the book!’ (Van Oers & Hännikäinen, 2001, p.106), ‘We are the same!’ (De Haan & Singer, 2001, p.120), and ‘Let’s’ (De Haan & Singer, 2001, p.121), they are implicitly developing a particular membership among the group. The use of “we” and “us” serves as a boundary to separate non-members from members, which again indicates the togetherness and otherness in the same group.

1.4.4.4 The importance of togetherness

It was discussed in the literature that togetherness plays a vital role in children’s social and emotional development in group life (Boldermo, 2020; Van Oers & Hännikäinen, 2001). Older children who strongly feel affiliated to a peer group have a clear identity in membership, which fosters competence in problem-solving and teamwork (Van Oers & Hännikäinen, 2001). Shared togetherness between children also increases the frequency of their prosocial behaviours and interactions (Boldermo, 2020). According to the observation of Boldermo (2020), a toddler participant was well-treated by three other peers in play even though there was no evidence that they were close friends. Because of the positive experience with her peers, the toddler showed desire, and made an effort to gain entry to the peer community (Boldermo, 2020).

To investigate the infants and toddlers’ social behaviours and adjustment to early childcare, Datler, Ereky-Stevens, Hover-Reisner, and Malmberg (2012) invited 104 Viennese children under three years old ($M=22.97$ months) to participate in their study. Participants

were purposively selected from diverse demographic characteristics. Four observation time points were set at two weeks before their transition, two weeks after onset, two months after, and four months after (Datler, Ereky-Stevens, Hover-Reisner, & Malmberg, 2012). Results revealed that most of the transitioning children interacted with their peers more than once at the beginning of transition. While their negative mood was observed to drop after four months, there was an increase of social interaction of these young children with their peers (Datler, Ereky-Stevens, Hover-Reisner, & Malmberg, 2012). To explore the transition experience of infants and toddlers in a group setting, Dalli (2003) observed one 18-month old infant and one 26-month old toddler for six weeks since their onset in two different early childcares. Both children showed pro-social skills when relating to peers. It is believed that they extended their social knowledge in those interactive events and their exposure to peer interaction contributes to their transition experience (Dalli, 2003).

1.5. Chapter summary

While there is useful literature about older children, there remains few investigations specifically into infants' and toddlers' social lives. The little research there is suggests that togetherness, emotional closeness, or affiliation influences children cognitively, socially, and emotionally to a considerable degree. The exception is the study of Mortlock (2015) where a group of under-tuos in a New Zealand childcare centre were observed, and a sense of togetherness they created with rituals was discussed. Since most prior research has a focus on older children, more studies to investigate social connections of infants and toddlers younger than three-years old are needed (Boldermo, 2020).

The impact of children's first transition experience on their sense of togetherness is arguably significant to their social security and emotional well-being. Given that transition

into ECE is a time of considerable upheaval, it is critical that attention is given to infants' and toddlers' peer culture during a child's transition from home to an ECE environment (Degotardi & Pearson, 2014). Also, critical are the ways that togetherness might support or inhibit a child's successful transition and their socio-emotional competence in the long run. However, still little relevant literature laid emphasis on those youngest children's affiliative relation to peer group during the critical transition period. Little is known about what ways infants and toddlers emerge in a peer social group and develop a sense of belonging and togetherness with peers when they are in a new group environment at such a young age. Still, it is safe to say that relevant research is lacking in a New Zealand context (but see Dalli, 2003), even though the provision of young children's social competence is clearly stated in many government documents including the national curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) which has a good reputation in the worldwide ECE sector.

Transition can turn into a difficult, struggling, and stressful experience for those infants and toddlers as they are constantly exposed to insensitivity from adults (Degotardi & Pearson, 2014; Ereky-Stevens, Funder, Katschnig, Malmberg, & Datler, 2018; Gunnar, Larson, Hertsgaard, Harris, & Brodersen, 1992). Therefore, it is also important to investigate how ECE teachers can assist infants and toddlers to build a sense of belonging to their peer group with peer support during transition. This sense of belonging is likely characterised by 'togetherness' or being part of the peer group's 'we'. Even so, no literature has been found to have a focus on under-two's togetherness during their transition from home to out-of-home. There is a gap that we have little knowledge of when and how infants and toddlers foster a sense of togetherness during adjustment. Given the limited academic exploration on the critical first transitioning of children at their very young age, there is little guidance that

teachers can refer to in practice. As a result, settling a child into a peer social setting is likely to be a challenge to many practitioners.

There is evidence to show that the presence of teachers and their emotional support has a great impact on older children's positive social behaviours and self-control in peer interaction (Brooker, 2014; Degotardi & Pearson, 2014; Dolby, Hughes, & Friezer, 2014; Ibrahim H, Hong, & Wu, 2017; Merritt, Wanless, Rimm-Kaufman, Cameron, & Peugh, 2012). It is likely that the same is true for infants and toddlers. Teacher's lack of training and experience to scaffold children's affiliative togetherness with peers during transition might lead to a worrying result that young children's socio-emotional needs are not being met in this sensitive period.

While most extant studies have been focusing on the influence of adults on children's transition experience, the present thesis laid emphasis on the peer-peer relationship, the significance of togetherness, the sense of belonging in a group, and peer socialisation and their powerful impacts on young children's transition and socio-emotional competence. Also, how teachers enable the transition of infants and toddlers in an emotionally responsive way was discussed. This thesis proposed three key research questions as follows:

1. What strategies does a transitioning infant/toddler use to affiliate with the peer group?
2. In what ways does an infant-toddler peer group enable a sense of togetherness for a child transitioning from home to an early childcare context?
3. What do teachers do to scaffold a transitioning child to affiliate with the peer group?

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1. Research design

The present research was conducted in an ethnographic approach. Ethnography is a means to study a particular group of people, with a focus on understanding the social meaning of their actions, and to understand cultural systems, beliefs, and values that the group form and share (Creswell, 2019; Johnson, 2014; Stephenson, 2011; Theobald, Bateman, Busch, Laraghy, & Danby, 2016). It is a process of writing a story of a particular group of people or portraying an image of that group of people with a background of where they live and work, and what their thoughts, values, and culture are (Creswell, 2019). The nature of ethnographic study demands researchers to live in the same environment with the studied group, to be fully involved in their experiences, and to think in the same way of the group members do in a sustained period of time. In this way, researchers are able to develop an in-depth insight into the group and ‘speak’ for them through answering research questions (Stephenson, 2011).

2.2. Theoretical frame

As noted, young children are active social agents who have a strong tendency to initiate social interactions and form reciprocal relationship with their peers (Corsaro, 2018). According to Oliver (2012), symbolic interactionism is a pragmatical theory which is an approach highly compatible to interpretive description. Therefore, it is employed in this present thesis to investigate the complex social phenomenon of young children.

Social meanings are co-constructed through collective actions of individuals who shared the same group value, norms, and culture (Corsaro, 2018). From a symbolic interactive perspective, Blumer (1969) emphasised that one’s own interpretation of social meanings is

produced on the basis of reciprocal social interactions between individuals and one's own understanding of the sociocultural context that one lives in. This process involves constant interpretation, communication, and assessment so that individuals reach agreement about the meanings of things. In other words, a person's reaction, behaviour, and response are aligned with actions of others. In group life, human beings tend to fit their actions into others' after interpreting those actions (Blumer, 1969). Human beings react to the subjective meaning that the things have for them as opposed to the objective meaning that things represent (Blumer, 1969). Individuals might have various interpretation of the same action; for example, one might interpret reaching out a hand as a social friendly gesture while another might see it as an invasion of their own space. Therefore, the second person has a different response from the first person (Blumer, 1969).

Further, the presence of symbol reflects and represents the emotions, thoughts, understanding, and psychological status of a person (Blumer, 1969). For instance, Mortlock and Green (2020) shared their findings that pre-schoolers might feel discomfort at the mat time, but they express their feelings and thinking in ways that are full of humour and playfulness, which indicates their ability in symbolic expression. To some extent, the symbols that children use can be a good indicator to identify their participation in group experience and sense of belonging in peer group (Mortlock & Green, 2020). It is believed that the mischievousness of those pre-schoolers pretending to vomit towards others on mat time symbolically emphasised their boredom during this time (Mortlock & Green, 2020).

I chose to investigate the behaviours of participants in a symbolic interactionist perspective, which meant I will be engaged in the lived experience of participants, collecting data from where peer social learning took place, and deconstructing the meanings of their

social exchanges through a sociocultural lens. I included other aspects such as the social contexts, social hierarchy, group value, peer power, and peer culture in analysis. Symbolic interactionism as a theoretical approach is ideal in this current research to investigate the ways young children to learn social skills, to make sense of their social world and to understand the meanings behind their social interactions with peers in a group context.

In this current research, children's implicit and explicit symbolic interactions were observed, documented and assessed. Explicit symbols refer to verbal language and physical gestures such as physical contact and body language, which are easy to capture during interactions. The social interactions between young children can also be subtle and fleeting (Boldermo, 2020). Therefore, actions such as eye contacts and facial expressions, which implicitly indicate the shared engagement between participants under the same social context, were also included.

2.3. Selection of research site

There are criteria for choosing suitable early childcare centres for this research. It has to meet the definition of an early childcare centre in Chapter 1, which differs from public kindergarten, Kōhanga Reo, Pacific Island early childhood centre, home-based care, and playcentre. Also, it has formal licence to provide sessional or full-time teacher-led early childcare services. Identifying an early childcare centre in my local community, I contacted three owners of the targeted early childcare centre via email, explaining to them my research project. After receiving their initial permission in email replies, I met one of the owners in person to further elaborate the research process. An organisation information sheet and consent (see Appendix A) was sent and permission to conduct my research on site was

obtained after ethics approval no. 28903 (see Appendix B) was issued by Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee.

The present study was conducted in an urban early childcare centre in one of the major cities in New Zealand. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, I followed suggestions from the University to conduct my research locally. Therefore, I chose an early childcare centre in the city that I live in and which I am employed as a teacher. I will write more about this in the subsequent sections. The early childcare centre has two buildings: one for infants and toddlers, and another for pre-schoolers. Selecting this early childcare centre allows me to focus mainly on those under two. Another reason for this childcare centre to be selected is its good reputation in the community, which is proved by its long waiting list. Its reputation for quality practices enhances the likelihood for supportive transition practices and settled, secure children. The childcare centre is referred to as ‘Rainbow’ in the present thesis.

2.4. Environment setting of research site

The selected childcare centre is located in a residential area. Children who attend this ECE centre are mostly from socio-economically advantaged families. The whole centre consists of three rooms, infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers. Like most early childcare centres in New Zealand, children’s attendance in different rooms is in accordance with their age. Since the preschool room is in another building and this study solely focuses on children under 3 years old, only infants and toddlers who occupy the same building were invited to participate in this research.

Unlike many centres, the infant room and the toddler room are separated into two rooms, the inside space of the two rooms at Rainbow is separated only by a short-barred

movable fence where there is a gate accessible for toddlers to enter and leave the infant room (see Figure 1). As to the outdoor space, there is also a small movable fence and a few poles to separate the two rooms (see Figure 2).



Figure 1: The indoor gate between the infant room and the toddler room



Figure 2: The outdoor gate between the infant room and the toddler room

The function of the fence and the gate seems to go beyond separating the building into two rooms. To infants, it represents separation or reunion as it is the place where family caregivers disappear and reappear. Also, it encourages children's physical, mental, and social interactions between the infant and toddler rooms. Infants and toddlers are often noticed communicating verbally or nonverbally with each other while leaning on the gate. In addition, both infants and toddlers are empowered to explore across the two rooms, provided permission is sought and granted from teachers. Often, infants will be given support to open the gate while most toddlers have the capability to do it themselves. All observation for this present research was carried out at the infant room of Rainbow. However, the frequent interactions between child participants across two rooms has enormously and surprisingly enriched the data of this present research.

2.5. Selection of participants

A criterion of a purposeful sampling strategy was used in this present research. Participatory invitation was sent out to all permanent on-floor teaching staff and the parents of the children, with a few exceptions, which included children who did not attend the childcare centre on the days that I undertook observations, and children soon to move to the preschool room during the research period. Since I was also part of the teaching team at the research site, I was ethically prohibited from recruiting two other children with whom I had a principal and secondary care relationship as this could compromise their care. As a result, 21 children were invited to participate in the study. The sample consisted of four girls (AVE age = 14.3 months) and two boys (AVE age = 13.0 months) from the infant room, and 6 girls and 9 boys, with an average age of 27.67 months and 25.2 months respectively from the toddler room.

Among those 21 children participants, one toddler boy and two infant girls were selected as main participant-targets for observation because they were transitioning into the peer group. They were under three years old at the onset of transition; were enrolled from home to a teacher-led early childcare centre for the first time during this research; and lastly, they had no medical diagnosis of any forms at the onset of transition. While these children were the main focus for my observations, consent and assent for the other 18 child participants were also sought due to their potential social interaction with the three main children participants.

All eight permanent female teachers who spent at least 30 work hours with children on-floor¹ per week were invited to participate in this study. Among those eight teaching staff, one teacher worked as an unqualified teacher while the rest of them were qualified and registered teachers. On a regular basis, there were two qualified teachers working with infants while the rest worked in the toddler room. Usually one or two teachers from the toddler room who were familiar to the infants covered break/leave in the infant room. It should be noted that I had been a teacher only in the toddler room on non-research days during the entire time of fieldwork.

Consent and assent were sought from teachers, parents, and children. I gave teacher participants consent forms and information sheets (see appendix D). When consent forms from all eight teacher participants were collected, they were invited to hand out the information sheets and consent forms (see appendix E) to their key families whose participation was ethically eligible to this present research. Consent for participation was

¹ The work hours of most ECE teachers in New Zealand consist of non-contact hour and on-floor hour. While non-contact hour is normally used for paperwork in the office, on-floor hour refers to the time teachers spend on staying with young children in the same room and taking care of them.

given by all 21 families. Each of these families was gifted a five-dollar voucher of a local café as a thank to their time and cooperation.

I also sought assent from the child participants. As a trained teacher I was careful to read each child’s facial expressions and body language to assess their degree of comfort with being observed. When children appeared relaxed in my presence, I proceeded to observe them whereas if the children displayed any discomfort observation ceased. One pertinent example was when one of the main focus children demonstrated ongoing distress (e.g. crying out loud). It was conceivable that the child’s distress was linked to being very new to the setting, thus experiencing separation anxiety, rather than the present study, however, I felt that the most respectful course was to cease observing the child completely, despite the parental consent given. This meant that two focus child participants remained in the study.

2.6. Participants

Information about the early childcare centre and all participants such as name and location were confidential, and pseudonyms were issued. Pseudonyms issued were ‘Rainbow early childcare centre’ (Rainbow) and the two main child participants were recorded as Julie (participant 1) and Taylor (participant 2) respectively. While Julie attended Rainbow two short days per week, Taylor was enrolled full time (five long days). Some of the demographic information and the allocated pseudonyms for participants are shown in Table 1.

Pseudonym	Role	Age (M)*	Room	Gender
Julie	Main child participant	15	Infant	Female
Taylor	Main child participant	11	Infant	Female

Zoe	Child participant	15	Infant	Female
Amelia	Child participant	17	Infant	Female
Matthew	Child participant	12	Infant	Male
Aaron	Child participant	16	Infant	Male
Georgia*	-	13	Infant	Female
Nathan	Child participant	25	Toddler	Male
Jacob	Child participant	29	Toddler	Male
Skylar	Child participant	32	Toddler	Female
Abigail	Child participant	29	Toddler	Female
Kris	Key teacher of Julie and Taylor	-	Infant	Female
Catie	Teacher in infant room	-	Infant	Female
Raewyn	Teacher covering break in infant room	-	Toddler	Female

*Age – at the onset of observation; M – month

*Georgia is a child from infant room but was not included in this research as her attendance at Rainbow fell out of the research days. However, her name was mentioned in the conversations between teachers and other children. Pseudonym was issued.

Table 1: Details of participants with pseudonym

2.7. Data collection

The present research aimed to investigate the social interactions between transitioning children and their peers during a four-week period, starting from their official first day at early childcare centre. Therefore, observation was planned to start on Thursday 1st Oct, the official start day of both Julie and Taylor at Rainbow. However, ethics approval was not granted until 23rd Sept and consent collection from all invited participants was only completed on 2nd Oct. As a result, observation of Julie started on the 8th October, which was the second week/third day of her transition. Observation finished in four consecutive weeks,

on 29th October 2020. Meanwhile, the start day for Taylor's observations was also postponed to 22nd October due to her absence as a result of sickness. One scheduled observation of Taylor on 29th Oct was cancelled due to interruption from late attendance and following daily routine. Taylor's observations were finished on 19th November.

From October to November 2020, I visited Rainbow to observe Julie and Taylor from 9am to 11am every Thursday. This particular time was intentionally chosen as it was comparatively routine free, allowing children to have relatively more opportunities to initiate social interactions. However, on some visit days (29th Oct, 05th Nov, and 12th Nov), the start and finish time were moved to 9.30am and 12pm in compliance with the attendance time of Julie and Taylor. Times and dates for observation visits are shown in Table 2.

Participant	Date	8th Oct	15th Oct	22nd Oct	29th Oct	5th Nov	12th Nov	19th Nov
Julie	Week of transition	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th			
	Observation	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th			
Taylor	Week of transition	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th
	Observation	-	-	1 st	-	2 nd	3 rd	4 th

*Fieldwork – on-floor observation

*Week of transition – transitioning from a home environment to an ECE context for the first time

Table 2: Details of fieldwork

To enhance the validity of data, to develop a comprehensive insight, and to form an in-depth understanding of the research topic from multiple perspectives (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014; Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018; Patton, 1999), triangulation was implemented in data collection. Therefore, data in this present research was collected through multiple sources in two phases. In order to form a holistic perspective to the

studied group, their social behaviours, and the group culture (Johnson, 2014), additional topic-relevant data such as on-wall documentation was also collected during the two phases.

Phase 1: During two-hour observation time for each visit, Julie and Taylor relating to their peers were observed from a close distance. The data were recorded in three ways: video filming, written vignettes of significant moments, and event recordings of gestures using a schedule (see appendix F).

Social interactions of the two main child participants with their peers were recorded with the use of a digital camera. Verbal notice, for example, “I am about to start observation. Camera is on.” was given to one permanent teacher who was near the observed child, pairs, or group, prior to each observation. As highlighted by Johnson (2014), video record is frequently used in ethnographic research for its reliability and accuracy since ethnographers aim to capture details of a group, to investigate the essence of their cultural value, and to develop an in-depth understanding of the studied social phenomenon. In the present research, video-filming was used as one of the main tools to capture, record, document and depict social behaviours, norms, and culture of participants. The use of video-filming in research also enables researcher to conduct interaction analysis which is commonly used for coding social interactions occur in a natural daily life (Brauner, Boos, & Kolbe, 2018). With the use of video-filming, the researcher is allowed to revisit video footage for interpretation validity (Brauner, Boos, & Kolbe, 2018). This is particularly useful for young children’s unpredictable, subtle, and fleeting social interactions.

Written field vignettes were also documented to capture significant social moments of participants that were missed by video-filming. There are seven significant vignettes in total.

Photographic records were used to document details of the environment in which participants interacted.

In addition, the frequency records were taken of the children's body gestures using self-designed observation schedule (see appendix F). In the original design of the observation schedule, six variables (see table 3) which are often seen as symbols of social connection and emotional closeness, were selected to represent children's interactions with peers (for example, see Boldermo, 2020; Brooker, 2014; Harrison, Elwick, Vallotton, & Kappler, 2014). During the observation period, five more variables (see table 3) were added to adapt to the variety of children's peer interactions that took place. All variables are in numerical order. It should be pointed out that no.7 Cuddles with peers was added as a variable as Kris emphasised that this cue is a common means for Zoe to express her affection to those transitioning peers. Also, details of those appeared variables during observation period were documented for coding in the stage of quantitative data analysis.

Selected variables to represent children's peer interactions						
Original	1.Touch peers	2.Watch peers	3.Eye contact with peers	4. Respond to peers with facial expressions (e.g. smiling/crying)	5.Respond to peers with body language (e.g. move closer/away)	6.Verbally communicate with peers
Additional	7.Cuddles with peers	8.Play/interact with peers	9.Touch a toy in a peer's hand	10. Passing items to peers	11.Be taken items away from peers	

Table 3: Selected variables to represent children's peer interactions

When peer interactive moments of Julie and Taylor took place simultaneously, priority for being observed was given to Julie, who attends Rainbow fewer days than Taylor. Due to the absence of Taylor on 29th Oct, observation was solely carried out on Julie that day.

The total accumulated length of video footage of Julie and Taylor is 14 minutes 22 second, and 12 minutes 09 seconds respectively for the entire observation. The length of video footage of Julie and Taylor selected for analysis is respectively 8 minutes 09 seconds, and 5 minutes 29 seconds. Additionally, a 32-seconds video footage which recorded an interaction between Julie and Taylor was also included for analysis.

Phase 2: To avoid misinterpretation of children's interactive movements with peers, a teacher's perspective was sought through semi-structured interviews (Appendix G). A semi-structured interview generally consists of open-ended questions and topic-related questions evoked by the answers from interviewees (Galletta & Cross, 2013). Kris, as the key teacher of Julie and Taylor, was invited to participate in two semi-structured interviews which were carried out on 12th Nov and 26th Nov respectively. Before the start of fieldwork, I had proposed an interview protocol which was approved by the Research Committee during the process of ethical application. The semi-structured interview consisted of four parts of pre-set close-ended, and open-ended questions (see appendix G). Five close-ended questions were asked to identify personal information of interviewees. There are also nine open-ended questions to seek the perspectives of interviewees with regards to the research topic. For the flexibility of semi-structured interviews, researchers are allowed to focus on the specific experience of participants in studies by asking relevant in-depth questions which help interviews to remain on track (Galletta & Cross, 2013). Therefore, the interviewee of this study, Kris, was also asked in-depth questions relevant to her narrative responses for completeness and quality of data.

The perspectives of interviewees are paramount. Through answering the questions in semi-structured interviews, they provide another angle for researcher to look at the research

topic and form a comprehensive insight (Creswell, 2019; Johnson, 2014). Therefore, the purposes of these two interviews were to encourage Kris to share her views on the transitions of Julie and Taylor, to provide more information about their social interactions with peers, and to enhance the validity of my personal interpretation of children's socially interactive gestures. Two interviews took place in a quiet space in the premises of Rainbow on off-work hour of Kris, with no presence of others. These arrangements were for the purpose of maintaining her confidentiality and preventing potential conflict of interests.

2.8. Methods of data analysis

2.8.1 Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative data (event recordings) of this study was analysed in the approach of counting with the use of Microsoft Excel. Variables (children's bodily gestures) were labelled in a numerical order. Manually, I calculated the frequency of each label and three different types of social bids (reciprocated, unreciprocated, and rejected). Statistics from quantitative data analysis were presented in tables in the findings section.

2.8.2 Qualitative data analysis

Qualitative data analysis for this research was carried out inductively (see Figure 3). From database to main theme, the goal of qualitative data analysis is to summarise the essence of the studied social phenomenon (Creswell, 2019). From the database to two main themes, the inductive analysis is a continuous process.

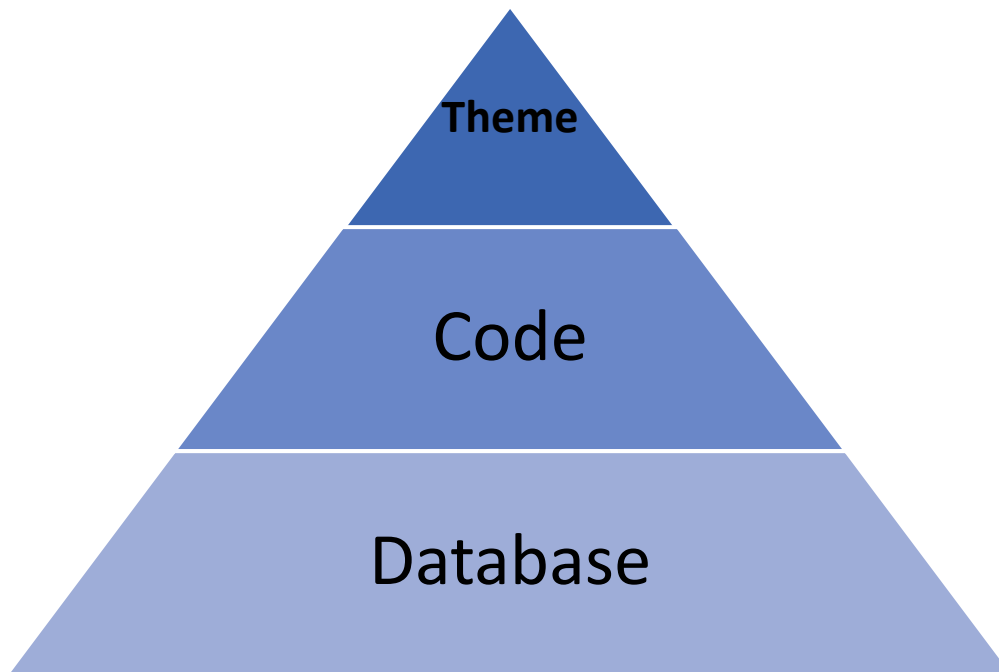


Figure 3: The inductive process of qualitative data analysis

Phase 1: Data base consisted of video-footage, field notes, and audio data from two interviews. According to Johnson (2014), visual data is particularly significant to studies that focus on culture. Given the high compatibility to symbolic interactionism (Oliver, 2012), narrative description was used to transform video-recorded data. Video footage was divided into short segments. By analysing the data segment by segment, it helps researchers to notice significant details that might be missing (Etherington, 2020). Agree with Etherington (2020), analysis is an organic process that requires constant reflection and examination during the entire research, I translated those segments of video footage into narratives immediately with field notes (significant vignettes) acted as reference after each observation. In this way, by the time of next observation, I was able to re-examine and refine those narratives with more data. The detailed narratives in turn provided a solid background for those significant vignettes in the coding stage. In the narrative enriching process, the pieces of lived experiences of participants are collaged and the stories of participants started to emerge (Etherington, 2020).

Interpretation is a significant characteristic of qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2019; Johnson, 2014). Therefore, next to the narrative description was my personal interpretation and reflective notes which were generated from multiple times of reading the description. In use of an automated transcribe voice smartphone application named Otter, my two interviews with Kris who is the primary care teacher of two main children participants, were turned into written transcripts. To truly present the social experience of participants, I cross examined my interpretation by asking questions and seeking answers from Kris. In this interpretive process, group culture and social values which are shared by all participants are also taken into consideration.

Phase 2: Key words such as the interactive gestures of children participants in texts were highlighted in preliminary analysis. After reading the narratives over times, these key words were filtered again with those appeared in high frequency picked out and labelled. While making labels for these key words in the coding process, there is a focus on the social meaning that these keys words symbolise in that particular peer culture and socio-cultural context. This inductive process generated 42 codes and they were grouped under three categories which are ‘transitioning child’, ‘peer group’, and ‘both’, with a colour coding approach (details see table 4). Each code captured the essence of the lived experiences of the corresponding groups. For example, the first code – ‘involvement’ under the ‘transitioning child’ category, is one of the most frequent behaviours emerged from the key words for two transitioning children. Another code ‘reading cues’ was observed in both transitioning children and peers, and therefore, it belongs to the third group – ‘both’. Since the coding process was carried out inductively, a subsequent step was taken to combine codes that are overlapped and reduce those less relevant. Twelve significant codes were generated and they

are presented in the next section. These were developed through an iterative process, following the suggestion from Creswell (2019).

Transitioning child		Peers		Both	
Involvement	Adopt strategy	Refusal	Proximity	Reading cues	Eye contact
Respect rejection	Learning group rules	Acceptance	Proper intervention	Toy trade	Shared understanding
Role switching	Physical contact	Familiar experienced face	Showing concern	Priority of possession	Cooperation
Demonstrate intention by consistency	Initiator in social interaction	Demonstrate group rules	Get in charge of games	Take and offer roles	Negotiation (problem-solving)
Group member	Skill acquisition	Persistency	Acknowledge membership	Parallel play	Vocal communication
Interpret gesture	Immerse in group culture	Ownership	Role model	Misunderstanding	Smile and clapping hands
Voice out to reclaim possession	Self-involve into group			Turn-taking	
Acceptance (compromise)	Show interest to involve in				
Looking for peer presence					

Table 4: Preliminary codes under three categories with a colour coding approach

Phase 3: During the first and second phases, I have been focusing on the data itself and have avoided drawing assumption. When it came to the last phase of data analysis, asking

myself those three proposed research questions while I was iteratively synthesising information from various data has been helpful to cluster all these codes. The thematic analysis was a process of presenting a wide variety of perspectives from participants which depicted a broad view of the studied social phenomenon (Creswell, 2019). In this organic analysing process, two main themes which are peer group membership and pedagogies for an affiliative social milieu gradually emerged from the stories that were told by participants. Not only my voice but also children's agency is presented in the main themes to reveal a true story of children's critical transitioning experience. The two main themes are reported in the discussion section.

2.9. Ethical consideration

According to Brannick and Coghlan (2007), the definition of insider research is research conducted in an organisation in which researchers are also active members. Given my fulltime employment position at Rainbow, this research is a typical insider research. This means I have a dual role in this project – as an active employed member of Rainbow and a researcher who has a “natural access” (p.60) to participants and the environment they live in (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). In the following sections, I will articulate the reasons for conducting an insider research, and features of insider research, followed by discussion of relevant ethical considerations.

2.9.1. Why insider research?

Conducting insider research has been debated for a long time. First, it may be difficult for insider research to meet the rigorous academic standards because of the membership of the researcher in the studied research site (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). However, thanks to those

flexible postgraduate study programmes provided in universities, more employees access post-study while remaining their full-time jobs (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). Therefore, it is common to see more teachers engaged in further academic study while working. Conducting an insider research allows teachers to seek answers that might arise from their work and practice. Such a trend in a scholarly field is becoming common in some countries including New Zealand (Humphrey, 2013).

Second, it is widely believed that academic professions and teachers do not always share the same understanding with regard to educational issues (Humphrey, 2013). A researcher's dual role in an insider study enables a researcher to see inquiries from more than one perspective. This may encourage them to see the importance of academic studies to their work. Also, having more teachers to engage in academic research will attract more attention to their valuable fieldwork wisdom (Humphrey, 2013).

Lastly, from the beginning of the research proposal and ethical application submission to field observation, the whole process has rigorously followed a code of ethics, as I am bound by teaching registration in New Zealand as a teacher and further bound by ethical policies of Victoria University of Wellington as a student. Also, ongoing guidance and supervision was provided by Dr. Mortlock over the entire research time to ensure this study met academic standards.

2.9.2 Ethical matters of insider research

2.9.2.1. Objectivity

2.9.2.1.1 Openness from nearness

Until now, insider research was criticised by academics for its lack of objectivity (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Kirova, Massing, Cleghorn, & Prochner, 2017). For a long time in the past, insider research has not been taken into serious consideration and it is seen as an organisation's internal assessment as opposed to an academic study (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). The validity of the research findings is in question because of potential research biases from the dual role of researchers.

Insider research is a return journey where the researcher starts from a familiar place, observes the organisation and participants in an 'outsider' role, and aims to interpret the culture of the studied group from an insider's perspective (Nielson & Repstad, as cited in Brannick & Coghlan, 2007, p.66). In this research, starting from the centre where I have an insider position means that I have basic knowledge and understanding to participants, which is crucial for field work. As pointed out by Dwyer and Buckle (2009), it is of importance for researcher to create a safe and comfortable atmosphere for participants, in particular those considered as vulnerable. For this research, teacher participants were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews in which they were asked questions with regard to the transition of child participants. Undoubtedly, it can be hard for them to do so as discussing social behaviours of a vulnerable group can be a sensitive issue. A sense of familiarity helps participants to believe that 's/he is one of us' and form a trust relationship with the researcher (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). With a trustful relationship, participants are more likely to share thoughts, insight, feelings, and information with a stronger willingness, especially those who work with vulnerable and minor groups (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

It is common and understandable that adult participants have concerns about being misunderstood or judged by outside observers due to the unfamiliarity to the context

(Hellawell, 2006; Thomson & Gunter, 2011). This might lead to a situation that information offered or shared by adult participants might be vague, simplified, or beautified. Such results unavoidably jeopardise the validity and trustworthiness of data without researchers noticing because they are confident that these data are valid as they derive from a direct source.

Role duality of a researcher seems to be an effective solution to eliminate this risk. Teacher participants in this research have showed great willingness, cooperation, and ease during data collection, based on the belief that their actions would not be judged since I am also their colleague who understands their educational philosophies, teaching values, and ethical concerns. Their self-protective guard was put aside when they felt they would not be misunderstood, misinterpreted, and judged. In one of the on-floor visits, for example, the key teacher of two main child participants, Kris has implicitly expressed her feeling about being observed by a co-worker. Therefore, a sense of nearness and familiarity is essential in ethnographic studies.

“At Rainbow, we practice RIE philosophy and we do not do things for children. Instead, we encourage them to do that by themselves. When there are conflicts between children, I will observe first and talk them through. I will not intervene until it gets physical. I am sure you understand that.”

2.9.2.1.2 Robust data to form an emic perspective

‘Emic perspective’ refers to the views of insiders in the group of being studied (Johnson, 2014, p.454). It is true that objectivity might be affected by the dual role of researcher at a certain level. Having an inner position in the studied centre means researchers have a “natural access” to crucial, original, and “hidden” data, that are covered in layers of culture which might be inaccessible to or be easily overlooked by outside researchers

(Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Leigh, 2014). These ‘hidden’ data are essential and valuable to form an emic perspective. When Stephenson (2011) studied how young children experience and contribute their input to an educational curriculum in a New Zealand context, she emphasised that the robust data she collected as an insider is meaningful and helps her to investigate what is underneath the surface of the curriculum.

Furthermore, since this research investigated a group of infants and toddlers who may have limited language, it was challenging to learn their social motivations, behaviours, and actions due to the absence of an extended vocabulary. Being an insider in the studied group allows a researcher to focus on children’s verbal and non-verbal language, to identify their symbolic gestures, and to read those cues in an appropriate manner for an accurate interpretation with a native insight (Engdahl, 2011; Løkken, 2011; Stephenson, 2011; White, 2011). Therefore, it was crucial for me as a researcher to get inside their heads as best as possible (as pointed out by Johnson, 2014), ‘listen’ to their voice, and attempt to see from their perspectives (as pointed out by Stephenson, 2011, p.138).

However, there is a paucity of research involving children’s voice in data collection and data analysis (Stephenson, 2011). This self-ethnographic insider research potentially not only empowers children’s own agency by attempting to give them the voice, but also advocates a growing awareness on this issue.

2.9.2.1.3 Being there as a member

One of the major dilemmas in inside studies is that the researcher’s personal emotions to the studied organisation and participants are potentially harmful to objectivity as the researcher is unable to review issues critically (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). Having little

experience in conducting observation from an academic perspective, I did not anticipate this insider research to be unproblematic. With an aim of observing children from a close distance, to include their voice, to answer with children's knowledge while being mindful of the objectivity of academic studies, I initially planned to play a "passive observer" role as Løkken described (2011, p.170) through "hiding" behind the camera, remaining in silence, and making no intervention during observation.

However, I soon realised this was barely possible. In a few occasions, I was asked by child participants for help, obligated to intervene, invited in play, and deprived of necessary observation equipment – specifically, child participants using my pens. Initially, anxiety arose from those interrupted moments. However, while I was reflecting on this issue in a research diary, a thought crossed my mind – my presence was acknowledged by the participants. Those moments might seem interruptive at the beginning, however, they implicitly indicated my position in the group – an insider who is living the same experience with participants together.

Applying symbolic interpretivism as theoretical frame in this research means interpretation in analysis was prone to be subjective. However, such subjective interpretation must be supported by evidence. Therefore, it was essential for me to remain at a close distance to the participants. Being an insider researcher, I delved into the same environment with children, was there with them, became a "native" in the group, and conducted valid and trustworthy interpretation from a "native" cultural perspective to the social system, and even the wider cultural setting. Through this close connection, my insight into young children's evolving and subtle social learning was widened, deepened, and enriched. In other words, only when one sees oneself as an insider of the group can one understand the worldview of

the studied group and then speak for the group from an emic lens (Kirova, Massing, Cleghorn, & Prochner, 2017).

Conducting insider research empowers researchers more than gaining an emic perspective as an insider in the organisation, but also building extensive knowledge of the environment and culture of studied groups (Kirova, Massing, Cleghorn, & Prochner, 2017). With an expectation to compare and investigate early childhood teacher education programmes internationally, Kirova, Massing, Cleghorn and Prochner (2017) recruited participants from three teaching education programmes in different operational and cultural contexts across the world – Namibia, Columbia, and Canada. The researchers soon encountered dilemmas pertaining to how the teaching programmes were influenced by local value or indigenous culture; thus, gaining an emic perspective was made impossible. As a solution, the researchers merged into the local cultures in order to bolster their understandings of those cultures and potentially resolve the dilemmas. From this example, it is clear to see that membership in a group is a powerful tool to interpret that group's terminology, underlying values, and cultural beliefs in academic research (Kirova, Massing, Cleghorn, & Prochner, 2017, p.106).

2.9.2.2 Conflicts of interests

Another dilemma from conducting insider research is the potential conflicts of interests that may occur during research period. Prior to this research, there were existing relationships between me as a teacher, the studied childcare, and the invited participants. To mitigate risks and to protect the rights of all parties involved in this research, vigilant preventive measures were taken.

2.9.2.2.1 Caring relationship

At Rainbow, a key caring system is applied in practice as a teacher was not only the key teacher of a certain number of children, but also played a secondary carer role to another group of children. In order to prevent the caring relationship from being jeopardised, only children who did not share a key or secondary relationship with me were invited in this research.

2.9.2.2.2 Collegial relationship

Another major concern was the potential harm to existing collegial relationships. As mentioned, insider research is often seen as internal assessment and participants involved in research might be suspicious of the ‘real’ purpose of the research. Participants may have concerns that their rights to work in the organisation might be threatened due to their performance in research (Humphrey, 2013). Likewise, it is possible that the collegial relationship between teacher participants and me in this present research was jeopardised.

However, the decision of conducting this insider research was made possible for a few reasons. First, most teacher participants were experienced in participating in insider research as this is not the first such study conducted at Rainbow. Both the management team and teaching team understood well that the core of this present research was to investigate the peer social world of children under three years old and to explore scaffolding strategies to facilitate a smooth transition experience for children. Therefore, findings in this research were not related to any internal employee appraisals.

Second, the research purpose was also well explained to all teaching members involved in this research through a variety of methods, such as written introduction on a wall (see appendix C), information sheet attached with consent form (see appendix D), and verbal communication. The main study subject was infants, toddlers, and their social behaviours driven by intrinsic desires. The purpose of discussing teaching practices in this research was solely for future improvement for the entire ECE teaching group. Therefore, teacher participants were given options on the consent form to receive a digital copy of the final thesis via email.

Third, it was also well-illustrated on the consent form that every invited participant had the right to withdraw from research prior to the onset of data analysis, without giving any reasons at any stages. Any dissent was respected. Fourth, to avoid misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and miscommunication, the main teacher participant, Kris, was given a copy of transcript of interviews for the purpose of review and redress. With all these preparations, many teacher participants showed interest in this topic and reported at the onset of research that they looked forward to seeing the final findings as transition of young children is a challenge in many centres in New Zealand.

2.9.2.2.3 Self-identity

At the early stage, conducting an insider research at Rainbow where I play an active member role as a full-time teacher, had an impact on my self-identity. It is common that insider researchers have complex feelings to explore research questions at their own work organisation as they may find results in debate with beliefs, values, and norms of their organisation (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Leigh, 2014). Such concern caused anxiety prior to the

onset of field work as I was haunted by the lingering thought that my teaching identity would be challenged by those debates.

However, conducting this research forced me to answer questions that arose from practice and to investigate for the best interests of young children. During the entire process, my professional identity was reshaped in a good way. I agreed with Leigh (2014), that conducting insider research should not be seen as a threat to self-identity but as an opportunity to proceed in the transformation of identity, provided researchers are constantly aware of the role switching between researcher and insider. Being in the role of researcher allows me to form an etic perspective which is referred as a researcher's objective, social-scientific view to his/her studied group (Johnson, 2014). As Leigh (2014) emphasised, having the opportunity to be exposed to such rich emic insights is also a unique learning experience to researchers, and I certainly found it so.

To increase and enhance my awareness of role switching, a number of measures were taken on field work. When I was in the role of researcher, I wore a name tag as a reminder to myself and others of the role switching. In an interesting anecdote, awareness of my role switching was also shown by co-workers. For example, I wore a pair of white pants one day (an uncommon colour because of the potential for incurring stains when working with young children) and my co-workers pointed out with a sense of humour. "Why are you wearing white pants today? Oh, yes, it is your first observation day. You are a researcher today!"

2.9.2.3 Welfare of participants

Another benefit of insider research is to protect the welfare of participants, especially those who are vulnerable. It was emphasised in previous sections that transition is a critical

and sensitive period for young children, and it can take months for them to get used to unfamiliar faces and settle in the new environment (Ahnert, Gunnar, Lamb, & Barthel, 2004; Fein, Gariboldi, & Boni, 1993). Having a familiar member to do observation was a matter of utmost importance for the best interest of participants in this research as it likely reduced irritation to transitioning children who might be suffering from separation anxiety. Also, staying in a small bubble was not the original motivation to choose my workplace as the research site. However, it seemed wise to do so under the instructions of New Zealand government around the time of the pandemic.

Furthermore, there were rigorous measures taken to safeguard the welfare of those very young participants. During the field work of this research, observation would not start at the presence of children not included as participants in the study. Once these children got involved in video-recoding, I terminated the observation and deleted those video-clips instantly. In addition, private caregiving moments such as nappy changing and sleeping were not included in observation. There was only one time that participants were video recorded at the beginning of their mealtime with the presence of a permanent teaching staff (see observation #14). The reason for this unique observation is that one of the main participants was transitioning from one-on-one feeding to eating with other peers at the same table for the first time. Since this important ritual usually symbolises a meaningful step of a child's transition at Rainbow, this special moment was recorded with the permission of their teacher. Two of three child participants in this observation noticed the camera recording but no one showed protestant gestures such as frowning or crying for this.

Chapter 3: Findings

Twelve primary codes were identified and organised into two main themes (see Table 5). The two themes were (1) peer group membership, and (2) pedagogies for an affiliative social milieu. The following section describes the strategies that infants and toddlers used to gain inclusion into the peer group, the corresponding actions from their peers, and the social milieu they lived in. The following section presents the various data in order to illuminate these themes.

Theme 1: Peer group membership		Theme 2: Pedagogies for an affiliative social milieu	
1. Transitioning children's willingness for social involvement	1.1 Observing peers	8. Being together	8.1 Family photo board
	1.2 Passing toys		8.2 Participation in lunch rituals
	1.3 Physical contact	9. Facilitating social interactions across ages	
2. Refusal from peers	2.1 Changing body proximity	10. Active observation and "passive" intervention	
	2.2 Negative reactions	11. Role modelling with language support	
3. Accepting rejection		12. Social identity reinforcement	
4. Peer acceptance			
5. Conciliatory strategies			
6. Vocal communication			
7. Non-verbal communication			

Table 5: Twelve primary codes and two main themes

3.1. Transitioning children's willingness for social involvement

3.1.1 Observing peers

The two transitioning participants had shown great interest in observing other children during their first few weeks at Rainbow. Although they were not making direct contact with peers initially, it was considered a social interaction because it was often a necessary precursor to reciprocal interaction. In this section, I describe the two children's interactions with the observed peers prior to engaging with them. A noteworthy point is that teacher Kris perceived Julie to be "shy and tentative" whereas Taylor was socially gregarious (Interview #1 and Interview #2). Despite these differences, their approach was similar.

"She [Julie] started off being quite shy and tentative and curious...she would just quietly, curiously, look around and watch what the other children were doing... I feel that she is really interested in what they are doing, and she wants to feel like part of group."
(Interview #1)

"Taylor loves other children and has a natural interest in them." (Interview #2)

Observing other children formed nearly half of Julie's social interactions (see Table 6). While Taylor's frequency count of observing peers was lower than Julie, it still made up nearly 40% of her total interactions (see Table 7).

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Total
Total frequency count of all interactions	33	36	5	42	116
Frequency count (and %) of times Julie observed peers	13 (39%)	11 (31%)	3(60%)	17(40%)	44 (38%)

Table 6: Frequency count of times Julie spent observing peers compared to other social behaviours

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Total
Total frequency count of all interactions	8	36	17	16	77
Frequency count (and %) of times Taylor observed peers	2 (25%)	14 (39%)	7(41%)	5(31%)	28(36%)

Table 7: Frequency count of times Taylor spent observing peers compared to other social behaviours

Julie and Taylor moved between merely observing peers outside of reciprocal interaction and observing them during interaction. During the latter, there appeared to be an exploratory element to their interactions as evinced by the following vignettes developed from the video footage.

(Aaron had been playing with a basket while Julie observed him). “Aaron pointed one finger up and gazed at Julie to catch Julie’s attention... She looked at him [Aaron]and made a sound like “em” while Aaron was staring at the basket. Julie put her hand back to Aaron’s lap and looked at him. This action drew Aaron’s attention back from the basket... Julie looked at his face... Aaron slightly turned his body and he seemed to be searching for something. They both looked down to the floor at the same time. While Julie turned her head around to look at the cone in Aaron’s hand again, Aaron reached out the other hand to grab another cone near Julie’s feet. Julie also grabbed a silicone cup. She accidentally dropped it to the floor, it seemed she was meaning to pass it to Aaron.” (Observation #1 Week 1)

When Julie was involved in another two social occasions with toddlers Skylar and Abigail who were visiting the infant room, she used the same strategy of observing prior to

engaging a peer. The following two vignettes developed from the video footage are illustrative of this.

“She was observing Skylar playing with the lockbox. Julie also started to play with the lockbox... She looked at Skylar and tried to close a door on the lockbox which Skylar just opened... Julie looked at Skylar... and moved her hand away while Skylar closed the door.”
(Observation #2 Week 2)

“Abigail was turning the doorknob trying to go back to toddler’s space... Julie was next to Abigail and witnessing this. She reached her hand to the doorknob as well. Abigail let go of the doorknob and slightly stepped backward to look at Julie. They made eye contact. Julie’s hand was still on the doorknob, but she let go of it while Abigail tried to open the gate again.” (Observation #4 Week 4)

During the four-week research period, Taylor demonstrated increasing and long-lasting curiosity to her peers and their activities through constant observation.

“Taylor was looking at the family photos on the board. Amelia (child) came over to stand next to her. While Taylor was pointing her finger on one photo, Kris commented “That’s Matthew’s photo.” ... “Where about Amelia’s whanau [family] photo?” Kris said. Taylor then turned her head back and kept pointing to Matthew’s photo. She then looked up to Georgia’s photo, Louise said “That’s Georgia’s whanau.” Taylor glanced at her own family photo and again pointed to Matthew’s photo. She looked back to Kris again. Kris asked “em, what about Julie? Can you see Julie’s whanau?” She pointed to Matthew’s photo again and then moved to point to her own photo.” (Observation #10 Week 3)

“Taylor who was sitting on Catie’s (teacher) lap stood up and looked at Amelia cuddling Catie. She beamed a smile to them and cuddled Catie the way Taylor did. Catie held them in arms and laughed with them. They had an affectionate cuddle.” (Observation #11 Week 3)

Of particular interest was her passionate involvement in a ritual before lunch at observation #14 week 4. After experienced peer Amelia volunteered to the leadership of conducting the ritual of their lunch table, Taylor was fully engaged in observing the whole process from the beginning to the end. After teacher Raewyn and Amelia finished the karakia (prayer for meal), Taylor’s joyful handclapping indicating her enjoyment from at being there and witnessing the whole ritual.

Although there was not always opportunity for reciprocal interaction, Taylor frequently observed children in the toddler room as well as her peers in the infant room. My field notes indicated that she was often engaged in watching her toddler peers in multiple occasions. The following excerpts are just two examples taken from my observations.

“Taylor was leaning on Catie’s shoulder and was observing the children at the big space” (Observation #11 Week 3)

“Taylor was standing up and leaning on the gate, watching toddlers at the big space. She watched them walking past and she was also observing what was happening in the front room.” (Observation #12 Week 4)

A mitigating factor against Taylor forming contact after observation might have been the importance of comfortable body proximity as a means through which they connected with others. For example, unlike Taylor who were enthusiastic of close physical contact, Julie *“likes to place herself quite close with other children... If they [children] are all over in this*

one section, she [Julie] will come over and place herself nearby...Also, when there is a teacher and other children around, she also likes to come over and join. Sit herself on me or another teacher within the group... Julie is affectionate and especially lately that she realises that she can get super close to a teacher and she will definitely come over and purposefully sit on my laps, especially if it is a small group of children around.” (Interview #1)

3.1.2 Passing toys back and forth

Julie frequently passed toys to the peers as a means of initiating reciprocal interaction (see Table 8). Kris noted that Julie *“likes to pass children toys. And then she takes them back. Yeah, it is a lot back and forth interactions between the children. She seems to really enjoy that, and she makes sounds and gestures which showed that she is excited about that interactions happening”* (Interview #1). As for Taylor, she made fewer social bids of passing toys to peers which indicated that was not an important venue for her to initiate social interactions (see Table 9).

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Total
Total frequency count of all interactions	33	36	5	42	116
Frequency count (and %) of times Julie passed toys	8 (24%)	3 (8%)	0 (0%)	2(5%)	13 (11%)

Table 8: Frequency count of times Julie passed toys compared to other social behaviours

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Total
Total frequency count of all interactions	8	36	17	16	77
Frequency count (and %) of times Taylor passed toys	0 (0%)	4 (11%)	3 (18%)	0(0%)	7 (9%)

Table 9: Frequency count of times Taylor passed toys compared to other social behaviours

The evidence from the data is consistent with Kris's statements. For instance, Julie attempted to catch Aaron's attention by passing him a cup but failed. She persistently kept trying with another toy which led to a mutual toy-passing game with Aaron (Observation #1 Week 1). On Observation #6 week 4, Julie sat on the lap of Kris, watching another infant, Amelia, playing puzzles. Afterwards, she picked up a puzzle piece and handed it to Amelia. According to Kris, Julie's gesture of offering toys is an intentional strategy, as Julie always goes back to it when it works. *"It is such a purposeful one, but it is not forcing herself into people's space too much. There is a slight distance between the children but she is realising she can get their attention and she does not need to be too close to do it."* (Interview #1)

However, passing toys to peers was not always successful in forming reciprocal interactions. For instance, Taylor made three attempts of passing toys with verbal expressions to attract attention from others during the second and the third visiting weeks. However, all her attempts were unreciprocated when no one responded to them. This might explain why Taylor was not using this strategy as often as Julie.

"10:56 Taylor reached out a book to the big space outside and said hi;

10:59 Taylor reached out a book to the big space outside and said hi again;

11:09 Taylor reached out a book to the big space outside again and said hello this time.” (Fieldnote at Week 2)

3.1.3 Physical contact

Despite the fact that Taylor was less interested in interaction with peers through sitting close and passing toys, she seemed to like initiating physical contact (see Table 10). The following excerpts from an interview with Kris and my fieldnotes are illustrative to this.

“Her mum warned me that she likes to be a bit handsy when she notices the other children...She likes physical contact... I think she is a very enthusiastic girl who loves physical contact, those hugs, and fun and laughter... I think Taylor is a very social child and initiates that togetherness by coming over and making physical contact with the other children... She pats them or hugs them or goes up and says hi.” (Interview #2)

“This shows Taylor took the initiative in peer interaction. Her facial expressions also demonstrated that this was likely a pleasant experience for her” (Vignette #5 Week 2).

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Total
Total frequency count of all interactions	8	36	17	16	77
Frequency count (and %) of times Taylor touched a peer	3(38%)	5 (14%)	2 (12%)	0(0%)	10 (13%)
Frequency count (and %) of times Taylor touched a toy in a peer’s hand	2(25%)	2(6%)	0(0%)	4(25%)	8(10%)

Table 10: Frequency count of times Taylor made physical contact compared to other social behaviours

Interestingly, although Taylor made no physical contact to peers' body at the last week of observation, her touching a toy in a peer's hand made a quarter of her total social behaviours at that week. In terms of this change, Kris believed that Taylor had found other ways to interact with her peers in a group context and she is *"getting used to being in a group... When she [Taylor] first started, mum was saying she just takes toys of children and she grabs them and stuff. I feel that since she has been a part of Rainbow, that has changed because she has become more used to being in a group situation. She is also learning where her place is within that group...She does not go for children's face as much."* (Interview #1)

Compared to Taylor's enthusiastic initiatives in physical contact with peers, Julie seemed to be more tentative about doing this (see Table 11). Only on one mutual interaction at the first week, was she observed to touch the body of a peer, which is described in the following vignette.

"Julie had her hand on Aaron's lap for one second and then she moved it away... Julie looked at him and placed her hand back to Aaron's lap. Meanwhile she looked at him...Leaning her hand on Aaron's lap to support her movement, Julie reached out her right foot... She put her hand back to Aaron's lap and also moved her leg closer to him... Julie put her hand back to Aaron's lap for the third time and looked at him... Having no response from Aaron, Julie put the cone down on the floor and put her hand on Aaron's lap again to lean forward...Julie still put her hand on Aaron's lap and also looked at the cone Aaron was holding in his hands." (Observation #1 Week 1)

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Total
Total frequency count of all interactions	33	36	5	42	116
Frequency count (and %) of times Julie touched a peer	8 (24%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0(0%)	8 (7%)
Frequency count (and %) of times Julie touched a toy in a peer's hand	1(3%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	1(1%)

Table 11: Frequency count of times Julie made physical contact compared to other social behaviours

3.2. Refusal

Interestingly, Julie who was described as a shy and tentative child made far more social bids than Taylor who was gregarious (see Table 12). Julie had 43% of her social behaviours turn into reciprocated. Despite that, experienced group members, however, did not reciprocate or outrightly rejected their initial bids most of the time. Rejection was demonstrated through the change of body proximity or moving an item away and making protesting sounds. In contrast, unreciprocated behaviours were those characterised by peers ignoring the transitioning children. Overall, Julie experienced marginally fewer unreciprocated and rejected social bids from peers than Taylor.

Social bids	Total number of bids made	Reciprocated	Unreciprocated	Rejected
Julie	116	50 (43%)	57 (49%)	9 (8%)
Taylor	77	16 (21%)	51 (66%)	10 (13%)

Table 12: Frequency and percentage of social bids initiated by Julie and Taylor

3.2.1 Changing body proximity

During observation, Amelia, Abigail, and Aaron in particular changed their proximity to Julie when she made bids for interactions. The narrative generated from video recording clearly showed that Aaron leaned backwards four times to stay closer to teacher Kris and away from Julie.

“Julie picked up a green silicone cup and raised it up close to Aaron face. Aaron leaned his head to the back and Julie shook the cup in front of Aaron... Then Julie tried to pass it back to Aaron and kept trying to put it to Aaron’s hand. Aaron refused it by placing his hand behind his back and slightly leaning his body backward closer to Kris. Julie turned to put it to Aaron’s other hand. Aaron slightly moved his body to avoid touching the cone... This time, Aaron moved his leg away and leaned his body closer to Kris who was sitting near him.” (Observation #1 Week 1)

3.2.2 Negative reactions

While Aaron resisted Julie’s proactive social behaviours by moving his body proximity, other peers, on the other hand, showed strong negative reactions to demonstrate their resistance to Taylor’s impulsive and unpredictable social bids. The following vignettes developed from my fieldnote are illustrative to this.

“9:34 Taylor touched Amelia and Amelia didn’t like it and cried.

10:51 Taylor leaned on Matthew’s body. Teacher Catie moved her away when Matthew started to cry.” (Fieldnote at Week 1)

“9:44 Taylor touched Matthew, but he moved away.” (Fieldnote at Week 2)

“Matthew was playing in the space with Julie. Taylor walked past and saw them. She also wanted to come into the space. She squeezed her body in. Julie tried to stop her by

pushing her out and Julie also made vocal protests. Matthew walked away.” (Observation #13 Week 4)

3.3. Accepting rejection

It was identified in observation #1 that Aaron had shown a wide range of refusal symbols to Julie in their interactive contact. However, Julie’s response showed that she seemed not to be bothered by these rejection gestures and continued their interaction with persistence. *“He put his hand on Julie’s and pushed it away. It seemed Julie did not mind this, she again put her hand back to Aaron’s lap and also moved her leg closer to him... Aaron refused it by placing his hand behind his back and slightly leaning his body backward closer to Kris. Julie turned to put it to Aaron’s another hand. Aaron slightly moved his body to avoid touching the cone... Julie put the cone down on the floor and put her hand on Aaron’s lap again to lean forward. Aaron again pushed her hand away [this time with a bigger movement] and this made Julie looked back at him... This time, Aaron moved his leg away and leaned his body closer to Kris sitting near him... Julie picked up the silicone cup and passed it to Aaron whose back was against her.”* (Observation #1 Week 1)

Likewise, it was noticed that when unreciprocated or rejected social bids occurred, Taylor also showed no frustration but simply moved away and came back to repeat what she did. This behavioural pattern was highly consistent and was clearly documented in video data and field notes.

“10:12 Taylor touched the sandpit toy in Zoe's hand and Zoe didn't like it. Taylor walked away.” (Fieldnote at Week 1)

“Receiving no reciprocal response from Julie, Taylor turned around and walked towards Aaron.” (Observation #7 Week 2)

When her desire of joining in the game between Matthew and Julie was turned down by Matthew and Julie with clear bodily gestures, Taylor still walked away in a calm manner.

3.4. Peer acceptance

Although the peer group had initially showed many different rejecting signs in mutual interactions with Julie and Taylor, they also showed acceptance on a number of occasions. The parallel play between Julie and Aaron which took place on the second week of Julie's transition to Rainbow was indicative. *"After Aaron took a rattle off Julie's hand, he immediately gave it back to Julie. Julie carried on the game by taking over the rattle but handing it back to Aaron... Aaron again gave the rattle back to Julie... Aaron leaned forward and passed the rattle back to Julie to hold it again."* (Observation #3 Week 2). In contrast to those refusal gestures that Aaron had showed prior, his willingness to play with Julie was evident in this event. The rattle was continuously passed back and forth between these two young infants many times, and this parallel game eventually lasted one and half minutes. In this experience, Julie was accepted as a playmate by Aaron.

Another peer, Amelia, also showed acceptance to Julie's participation in a game. While Amelia was playing puzzles, Julie handed over a puzzle after observing Amelia for a while. The later back and forth interaction with Julie and the gesture of clapping hands evidently demonstrated Amelia's acceptance to Julie's participation.

"Amelia took the triangle out and passed it to Julie whose left hand was still reaching out in the air. Julie took it over from Amelia. Julie passed the triangle from left hand to right hand and quickly reached out her left hand again to Amelia, with making sound like 'eh'

again. Amelia picked up a square and passed it to Julie. Julie again took over and Amelia let it go. Amelia clapped her hands.” (Observation #6 Week 4)

As for Taylor, Kris believed Taylor was embraced by the group for her sense of humour and her *“more predictable manners”* (Interview #2). *“Zoe and Taylor show a lot of playfulness when they are together which probably helped Taylor’s social interactions. When Taylor calm down a little bit and got more used to being in the infant room, she interacted with the group in a playful way”* (Interview #2). According to Kris, Taylor learned that games such as “peek-a-boo, laughing [with peers], or running around were powerful tools to initiate positive social exchanges with her peers without physical contact as the group members were often drawn to participate in games that Taylor and Zoe initiated. Such playfulness brought the whole group together and it assisted Taylor to nurture a sense of belonging to the group and develop more appropriate social manners (Interview #2).

3.5. Conciliatory strategies during peer conflicts

When interacting with transitioning children, experienced children have showed surprisingly sophisticated negotiation skills in organising social rules in the peer group such as claiming their ownership of toys or settling conflicts in toy trades.

While engaging in an interaction with Aaron, Julie showed strong interest to a cone in Aaron’s hand. However, she overlooked a significant sign of rejection of Aaron *“bringing the cone away from Julie’s hand”* and was persistent to take it over in multiple tries. Failing to reject Julie, Aaron turned to a negotiation strategy.

“Aaron slightly turned his body and he seemed to be searching for something... Aaron reached out the other hand to grab another cone near Julie’s feet... He picked up the cone and placed it right to Julie’s face. Julie took it over.” (Observation #1 Week 1)

Offering alternatives was also skilfully used by toddler Nathan. Unlike Aaron who attempted to protect his possession of the cone, Nathan stepped in as a third party to mitigate the tension arising from the conflict between Amelia and Julie. When Amelia was reluctant to return a toy car to Julie, Raewyn suggested finding Julie alternatives. Nathan, who had been playing around, took immediate action. *“He chose a toy from the shelf and brought it to Raewyn and Julie... Raewyn pointed out that the beads on the toy can turn just like the wheels on the car. Nathan walked away.”* (Observation #4 Week 4). Julie seemed satisfied with this toy and started to play with it.

While Aaron desired to maintain his possession of a cone, Nathan was self-motivated to intervene in the peer conflict between Julie and Amelia; despite their different goals, the same strategy was used – offering Julie alternatives. It is worth noting that this strategy is part of pedagogy of Rainbow and is often used by teachers in practice.

On the other hand, infant Matthew was observed to succeed in claiming a book back from Taylor in a video clip. Matthew *“reach out his hand to the book again but Taylor did not let him touch the book... Matthew determinedly and quickly grabbed the book in Taylor’s hand... Matthew got the book back and started reading it again”* (Observation #9 Week 2). This demonstrated that Matthew understood the social convention of his priority to the book. Passing on the book to Taylor after reading also indicated Matthew’s understanding of social

rules in group that his ownership of the book was temporal as the book belongs to everyone in the group.

When Taylor encountered peer dominance, she also adopted a conciliatory strategy to avoid conflicts with Zoe. *“Taylor was playing at a semi-circle mattress. Zoe came out to the outdoors and she tried to squeeze her body in the same mattress with Taylor. Taylor walked away. After Zoe left the mattress, Taylor came back to it. Zoe again came over to the mattress. Before she came into the mattress, Taylor moved away.”* (Vignette #5 Week2)

3.6. Vocal communication

Although most child participants in this research were under two years old when observation was conducted, their social ability of using communication to facilitate interactions with peers was evident in vignettes developed from fieldnotes and video footage.

3.6.1 Capturing attention

Vocal expression was evident in the social interactions of these preverbal infants and toddlers. While Julie tended to observe others a lot, she was not always “quiet” as described by Kris (Interview #1). By the third week of observation, when Julie was observed to be babbling and making funny faces on her own, Raewyn commented *“She is so vocalising now, and she just keeps practising talking outside by herself”* (Vignette #3 Week2). Video data and field notes also demonstrated that Julie was becoming a vocal child who understood the power of vocalisation. She used it as a tool to gain attention from peers in mutual social interactions. For instance, Julie was captured drawing Aaron’s attention by making the sound of “em” at the first visiting week. She also facilitated her interaction with Amelia with verbal

communication, mainly by making a sound like ‘eh’ (Observation #6 Week4). Taylor was also captured waving a book and saying ‘hi’ to catch attention from toddlers three times while she was only allowed to stay in the infant room.

3.6.2 Expressing affection

Some infants were able to express their affection to peers verbally. Zoe often ran over to the gate and said ‘hi Taylor’ at Taylor’s arrival; Taylor, in turn, did the same with excitement when she saw other teachers and children approaching the gate of the infant room. From the perspective of Kris, it is a gesture showing their happiness to see each other and this also “*made other children feel welcome*” (Interview #2).

3.6.3 Communicating requests

Preverbal infants also vocalised to communicate their requests with peers. Matthew voiced out twice (“aya” and “ehhh”) to “ask” for a book back from Taylor (Observation #9 Week 2). Julie did the same while her toy car was taken away by Amelia (Observation #4 Week4). However, Julie’s request was firmly turned down by Amelia whose response was to “*make a high pitch voice*” and “*turn her body against Raewyn and make a protesting sound*”. As an older toddler, Abigail was more capable of communicating properly with clear verbal expression. When she was closing the gate of infant room, she reminded Julie “watch out” twice.

3.7. Non-verbal communication

It is evident that the two transitioning infants and their peers used rich body gestures in social experiences. Of particular interest was that Julie and Taylor appeared to use more body gestures in interactions than their older peers.

3.7.1 Eye contact

In a social interaction where Abigail accomplished her goal with Julie's collaboration (observation #5 Week4), evidence showed that the two of them made eye contact twice.

When Abigail attempted to open the gate to leave the infant room, Julie was seemingly to assist Abigail by reaching her hand to the doorknob. Abigail looked at her and they had the first eye contact. After this, it seemed they reached an agreement as Julie moved her hand away from the doorknob and left Abigail to keep trying to open the gate by herself.

Afterwards, Abigail realised she was unable to close the gate since Julie was in the way and at this time, they had the second eye contact. Julie then slightly changed her body position and Abigail was able to close the gate.

3.7.2 Hug

It should be highlighted that among all infant and toddler participants involved in this research, Zoe, one of the experienced peers and Taylor tended to express their enthusiasm to others with affectionate hugs. *"10:09 Zoe walked pass Kris and Julie and gave them a hug."* (Fieldnote at Week 2). At the third week, Zoe again gave Julie a hug enthusiastically and *"the hug became a bit too much as Zoe squeezed Julie's body tightly with her hands"* (Vignette #3 Week 3). The two were separated by Kris who told Zoe that Julie *"might need some space"* from that passionate hug. According to Kris, this was not a rare scene as Zoe was *"very affectionate"* (Interview #1) and enjoyed peer intimate bond.

In another observation, when Taylor saw Amelia walking to teacher Catie for a hug, Taylor *“beam a smile to them and hug Catie the same way Amelia did. Catie held them in her arms and laughed with them.”* (Observation #11). In interview, Kris also emphasised Taylor’s passion of hugging peers in group *“She pats them or hugs them or goes up and say hi... we have to remind her to hug with soft hands because she is excited to see them”* (Interview #2).

3.7.3 Back/head patting

Although Julie was only 16 months old during research, she expressed empathy, a sophisticated emotional capacity to Taylor responsively with sensitivity. *“Taylor was a bit upset sitting on the floor. Julie heard her crying and came over. She placed her hand on Taylor’s body, Taylor lay down on the floor and Julie patted Taylor’s back gently. When Taylor sat on her bottom, Julie continued to pat Taylor’s head until Taylor stopped crying.”* (Vignette #5 Week6). According to Kris, this is what Jacob liked to do to Julie at Rainbow. *“Jacob often comes over [to the gate] or comes in and he will talk with her [Julie] and touch her head”* (Interview #1).

3.7.4 Hand gestures

Evidence also showed that Julie understood to communicate requests with hand gestures. When Julie’s car was taken by Amelia, Julie reached out her hand to Amelia’s direction, claiming the toy car back (Observation #4 week 4). However, in the interaction where Julie and Amelia passing some puzzles back and forth (Observation #6 Week4), Julie used one body gesture to express two different intentions which consequently led to misinterpretation and miscommunication.

(1) Julie was reaching one hand to Amelia whom gave her a triangle piece. Julie kept it in one hand but reached out the other hand. Amelia might think Julie was asking for more and she passed a square piece to Julie.

(2) Julie pointed her left index finger to the puzzle board. Amelia assumed Julie was passing her back the square piece and she reached out her hand to grab it. Julie swiftly drew her hand back but still pointed to the puzzle board.

In scenario (1), Julie's hand gesture seemed to suggest a give-and-take interaction with Amelia. In scenario (2), it was highly likely that Julie's hand gesture is a request to put those pieces into the puzzle board. The way Julie made two different requests with the same hand gesture misled Amelia and terminated their game.

3.8. Being together

3.8.1 Family photo board

Taylor's curiosity to family photos of her peers had drawn my attention to the little corner in infant room. *"Taylor pointed to the photos and vocalised. Kris asked her if she could find her 'friends' photos and explained to Taylor who is in those photos"* (Vignette #6 Week 3). After a while, Taylor was found pointing to the photos in front of the board again. Kris again told Taylor who is in the photos that she pointed at.

Although the family photo board was introduced as *"a tool for children to talk to us about their family and other children's families... keep connections between home and centre"* (Interview #2), Kris also agreed it enhanced children's sense of community at some

level. The concept of “togetherness” might be relatively abstract; however, it is well-explained to children in a visible way through these family photos.

3.8.2 Participation in rituals

Taylor was invited to have meals at the same table with their peers at the end of observation period. *“Taylor was sitting with Aaron and Amelia at the same lunch table. While teacher Raewyn got a match out, Amelia said “Blow it.” Raewyn asked, “Would you like to blow out the match?” Amelia raised her hand and Raewyn said “Okay.” Raewyn lit the candle and moved the match closer to Amelia. Amelia blew out the candle and Raewyn put the match away. Taylor witnessed all this. Amelia put out her hands and said “Nau mai [Welcome].” Raewyn also put out her hands and said “Nau mai? Okay. Are you ready?” Then they did the karakia [prayer for meals] together. Taylor clapped hands before karakia finished.”* (Observation #14 Week 4)

Sitting at the same meal table with experienced peers is a milestone for transitioning infants at Rainbow. At the beginning of their transition, infants are provided one-on-one feeding service. Only when they are able to show appropriate table manners such as sitting nicely and focusing on their own bowl of food, can they participate in group feeding. Their first group feeding will be reported to their parents at the end of the day as the mastery of these well-behaved manners symbolises a good adjustment into the new environment for transitioning infants in the culture of Rainbow. Teacher lighting up a candle and saying karakia with participating children is a ritual before meals at Rainbow. An experienced child volunteers to take the lead to say karakia and blow out the match is also encouraged, as provided the child is familiar with the whole procedure of the ritual and the requirements of safety, blowing the candle from a safe distance.

3.9. Facilitating social interactions across ages

Peer interactions between infants and toddlers were encouraged through allowing toddlers to visit the infant room if the ratio permitted. Abigail, Skylar, Jacob, and Nathan who were documented to have social interactions with Julie and Taylor during observation period were frequent visitors in the infant room. When interactions between toddlers and infants occurred, there was always a teacher being a facilitator (see an example Nathan's intervention in peer conflict with close supervision of teacher Raewyn in subsection 3.5).

3.10. Active observation and “passive” intervention

When Kris was asked in interviews, in what circumstances would she intervene in children's play, she demonstrated a strong belief that young children have an ability to resolve conflicts between themselves. Therefore, some of their “aggressive” behaviours were understood by teachers at Rainbow and they were given lots of opportunities to resolve their conflicts on their own but with close supervision. However, she also admitted there is a fine balance of doing so.

“I feel that is fine if something gets taken off [by] another child. Because then they can try and figure out how badly they want that toy... And then sometimes children do it [taking a toy off a peer] to make connection with the child... we need to give them the opportunity to say what they need to say and work it out... We can also model, how to talk to them about the toys. Say ‘Stop! I was using that!’, or ‘Stop! Oh no I do not like it’. Someone if they really want the book, we can encourage them ‘hold on to the book if you really want it’ ... It is a hard balance because you do not want to become so distraught and so upset that they go into their reptilian brain and they cannot work it out” (Interview #1).

3.11. Role modelling with language support

Kris had been aware of Taylor's ongoing strong impulse of making physical contacts to her peers at the beginning of her transition. She chose to facilitate Taylor through role modelling with rich verbal expressions.

"I sit close and show her with my hand, how to use gentle hands and I remind her with my words saying. I point out the child's facial expressions and might be like 'Taylor, gentle hands with Matthew', 'just soft stroking', 'touch his shoulder', 'he got eyes so be careful of his eyes'" (Interview #2).

Kris's approach was to support socially active infants who often are strongly impulsive by enriching their verbal expressions. This seemed to be a common practice at Rainbow. Video data recorded that teacher Raewyn also implemented this strategy in interventions (example see below).

[This took place before Nathan's intervention] *"Raewyn said 'oh dear. Now you both want to keep the car. Maybe you can drive back around to Julie [twice]?' Raewyn also showed Amelia the direction of driving the car to Julie... Raewyn turned to Julie and suggested 'Julie, we might have to say, 'Can I have it back please?'' She also role modelled to open her hands to Amelia... She made a hand gesture which means 'finish' in sign language that they commonly use at Rainbow."* (Observation #4 Week4)

3.12. Social identity reinforcement

There was an interesting phenomenon noticed with regard to the use of "friend" by teachers. At the onset of observation, Taylor was upset. In order to sit with two new transitioning children, Kris took Taylor to sit next to Julie. Meanwhile, she told Taylor *'This*

is your friend' (Vignette #1 Week 1) even though it was their first day to meet each other at Rainbow. When Taylor was showing interest in the family photos, Kris again referred the children in photos as Taylor's 'friend'. (Vignette #6 Week 3)

Chapter 4: Discussion

Two main themes emerged from this study are: peer group membership and pedagogies for an affiliative social milieu. Membership pertained to the affiliative feelings or closeness that transitioning children demonstrated to their peer group. Also, membership is related to the boundary that group members draw between themselves and outsiders. In contrast, social milieu was perceived as the sense of community developed in a learning environment from pedagogies that teachers implemented to enable a sense of togetherness between transitioning children and their peers. In this section, the findings are discussed, specifically the strategies that the transitioning children used to gain entry into the peer group, and the teachers' pedagogies.

4.1. Transitioning children striving towards peer group membership

4.1.1 Willingness for social involvement

In a group care context, young children are capable to form relationship with peers when they are infants (Degotardi & Pearson, 2014). Since the verbal social skills of infants might be limited by development, evident body language such as 'watching' and 'seeking proximity' (p.58-59) are often used by infants as means to involve themselves in social participation (Degotardi & Pearson, 2014). Highly resonate to this theory, two focus infants in this research showed strong interest in their social peer group, despite the fact that they were transitioning from their home to a completely unfamiliar social environment for the first time.

Very similar to strategies that adults tend to use in group social events, Julie and Taylor both started their social journey in a group setting by observing experienced group

members from a distance. When one person comes to a new environment for the first time, there is much to take in and make sense of, including the surrounding, the people, and the interpersonal relationships between people. Therefore, it is best to observe others from a distance before any actions are taken (Corsaro, 2018).

Observation was helpful for children to understand the meanings of their peers' gestures and what their behaviours implied (Rayna, 2001). It is worth noting that Julie tended to keep a close but comfortable physical proximity while observing others, a strategy described as 'nonverbal entry' by Corsaro (1985, p.123). Observing peers before and during interaction allowed Julie to read subtle cues and symbolic bodily gestures of Aaron, Skylar, and Abigail mindfully. Therefore, she was able to make judgements, respond in a socially appropriate manner, and adjust her social strategies accordingly. For instance, Abigail was able to open the gate with collaboration from Julie who had been observing and had made eye contact with Abigail twice.

Through observing peers in a close physical proximity, Julie also showed her peers her social desire to stay together with them and participate in their activities. This encouraged Julie to cultivate affiliation with her peers. Such closeness is the basis of forming togetherness in a group (Van Oers & Hännikäinen, 2001). These unforced actions not only benefited Julie to blend in the group without pressure, but also provided her peers opportunities to get to know Julie over time and consider Julie as 'one of us.' Staying together with other children emphasised Julie's presence in the group and enabled further reciprocal interactions.

Taylor's curiosity about other peers was strongly demonstrated in the time she spent recognising peers on the family board. She was interested in other children who were in the

same community with her (their photos were displayed next to hers). While observing other peers, Taylor also showed some imitative behaviours such as cuddling a teacher when she saw Amelia do so. Because Amelia's affectionate gesture was responded to sensitively and positively by the teacher, Taylor learned from her observation that such prosocial behaviours attracted others and contributed to shared emotional bonds which resulted in reciprocal interactions. Therefore, she hugged Catie exactly in the same way as Amelia did and she succeeded in involving herself in the triadic hug. Emotionally bonding with her peer in this social experience was likely to enhance the sense of togetherness of the triad, which was likely to have laid a solid foundation for Taylor's membership in group.

From her imitation we can see that Taylor constructed meanings from what she observed. In the final observation, Taylor's enthusiastic handclapping at the end of the ritual that she was involved in, represented a sense of identity to the peer group. She grew an understanding that she belonged to this group, not only that she belonged to the group in the infant room but also belonged to the wider community. It was as if she longed for a wider social network as she was often noticed observing toddlers in the big space as well with great excitement. Constant close observation enriched her learning of the rules, rituals, discourses, and social structure of her peer group, which positively contributed to her adaptation into the new social environment (see also Dalli, 2003).

Likewise, such creative imitation to nurture mutual emotional bonds was found in Julie's empathic back-patting of Taylor. Patting often symbolises young children's caring concern to the negative feelings of their peers (Rayna, 2001). The ability of demonstrating empathy to others is perceived as the key to social competence, according to Brownell and Kopp (as cited in Degotardi & Pearson, 2014, p.91). This consoling gesture reflected her

interpretation of the gentle head-patting she frequently received from toddler Jacob. Through interacting with caring experienced peers like Jacob, Julie considered gentle patting was a good strategy to soothe one's feelings. Therefore, she imitated this gesture and applied it on Taylor whom she believed needed it. In the study of Van Oers and Hännikäinen (2001), similar empathic gestures were also observed between two infants. Rayna (2001) proposed that such awareness of infants not only demonstrates their social ability to tell the difference of their own feelings from others, but also show their recognition to such difference. Such thoughtfulness is a result from learning in a group environment. In turn, it also nurtures a sense of togetherness in peer groups.

Although children acquire social knowledge from their experience with experienced peers or adults, they do not simply replicate social skills and apply them (Corsaro, 2018). On the contrary, they construct social meanings and develop relevant working theories based on contextualised understanding of facial expressions and bodily gestures. In this way, they respond accordingly based on their own interpretation (Corsaro, 2018; Danby, Thompson, Theobald, & Thorpe, 2012).

4.1.2 Affiliation towards peers in care group

Despite their identity as newcomers, Julie and Taylor were intrinsically motivated to affiliate with other children, and to improve their social status as outsiders to the peer group but with different strategies. It should be noted that Julie, who was described as shy and tentative by her key teacher, performed more social initiations than Taylor, who had a reputation for sociability. Moreover, Julie had more reciprocal social bids which led to many effective interactions with peers. One possibility for this difference is that Taylor's

enthusiastic but unpredictable physical contacts (e.g. touching a peer's body or toy) were interpreted by peers as a violation.

According to Engdahl (2011), the key to participating in joint activities is to be “attractive playmates” (p.1427). Young children tend to communicate their desire through bodily gestures (Hännikäinen, 1999; Ingrid, 2011; Kyratzis, 2004; Løkken, 2000; Mortlock, 2015; Namy, Vallas, & Knight-Schwarz, 2008). Consistent with these findings, Julie made her invitations appealing by offering Aaron and Amelia toys that contributed to the games they were engaging in. While handing toys over to peers can be seen as a friendly gesture to show one's initiative of making connections, it also serves as an invitation which leaves others time and space for others to consider and make their own choices (Van Oers & Hännikäinen, 2001). As Corsaro (2018) pointed out, this mature social strategy is widely used by adults. To Julie, it is also a silent way of asking “Are we friends?”. Given the fragile nature of peer interaction, such examination and confirmation are common in children's play (Corsaro, 1985).

Young children not only have a tendency to express themselves in bodily gestures, but also they are good at interpreting symbolic body gestures and making meanings from them (Namy, Vallas, & Knight-Schwarz, 2008). This is also found in current research. Julie's peers understood her need for involvement and they included her in much of the play. Julie being involved in joint activities with Aaron and Amelia by passing them toys, enhanced the sameness between them as they shared more similar social experiences. The sameness is also a significant feature of togetherness (Boldermo, 2020; Degotardi & Pearson, 2014; Hännikäinen, 1999; Koivula & Hännikäinen, 2017; Van Oers & Hännikäinen, 2001). The collaboration of passing toys back and forth between Julie and her peers also demonstrated

that they shared a mutual understanding of these games, which was beneficial for Julie's adjustment. Furthermore, Julie's persistence in passing toys back and forth in peer interactions revealed that she refined these two strategies by using them repeatedly in various social scenarios.

Taylor also showed affiliation to her toddler peers by offering them a book persistently when she saw toddlers walk past the infant room (Fieldnote at week 2). This evidence again showed that transitioning children manipulated props to accomplish their task in connecting with others (Koivula & Hännikäinen, 2017; Van Oers & Hännikäinen, 2001). Apart from this, Taylor showed a preference of physical contact to express affiliation. To some extent, such intimate gestures symbolised her social confidence at a high level which might be from her engagement in playgroups prior to her transition to Rainbow. Also, having an older sibling who also attended Rainbow possibly helped Taylor to feel more comfortable of entering a peer group and this contributed to her proactive social behaviours. However, expressing affiliation to peers through enthusiastic physical contact did not make Taylor an attractive playmate. On the contrary, it is very likely that Taylor's further interactions with peers were hindered by her impulsive physical contacts as many peers responded to them negatively.

Humour is a tool for infants to express their charm to and communicate their social needs with playmates (Loizou, 2005). It has a positive relation to a child's social competence (Loizou, 2005). It should be noted that Taylor's sense of humour (for example, Kris mentioned at interview #2 that Taylor liked playing peek-a-boo, running around and laughing with peers) mirrored her social confidence and the capability to interact with others. Humour is a safe way for children to make sense of the social boundaries and peer preference among

group members. In this way, newcomers adjust their interactive strategies with peers accordingly (Degotardi & Pearson, 2014). Taylor's sense of humour also assisted her to become part of the peer social group. Literature indicates that children's playful games are usually initiated by one person and are turned into collective actions with the participation of followers (Løkken, 2000; Mortlock, 2015). The motivation to enjoy the playfulness brings children together and as a result, fosters their togetherness in group (Hännikäinen, as cited in Degotardi & Pearson, 2014, p.96). Clearly, Taylor's playfulness placed her in a central spot when interactions occurred. She and her peers shared mutuality by enjoying play together. There was a strong sense of togetherness when they all shared the same jokes and had fun from it (Boldermo, 2020; Engdahl, 2011; Koivula & Hännikäinen, 2017; Loizou, 2005).

According to Kyratzis (2004), peer talk is crucial to the socialisation of children in a group setting. Technically, verbal communication of infants in this research was presented in a form of sound-making as opposed to full sentences. However, it is easy to see that vocal communication positively contributed to transitioning children's social experience with peers. It was used as a strategy for initial social participation. Julie and Taylor both tried to catch attention from others by making sound like 'em', 'eh' or 'hi'. The difference was that Julie seemed to have a better understanding of initiating reciprocal interactions with this strategy and each time she used it to a specific person. By doing this, Julie created the concept of a dyad where there was 'you' and 'me'.

Failing to draw attention from others, Taylor's social active gesture of saying 'hi' to random toddlers walking past was more like an expression of her affiliation to peers. Although Taylor also did the same as Zoe's saying 'hi' upon peers' arrival, this went beyond imitation. It reflected how a child reproduced social culture as a newcomer based on the

child's own interpretation (Blumer, 1969; Corsaro, 2018). It is possible that she considered this is a good way to build connection with others. In turn, this prosocial gesture also suggested her growing sense of belonging to the group and her own perception as being part of the group, because she did this to everyone whenever they approached the infant room.

4.1.3 Rejection from experienced peers

Although Julie and Taylor were both interested in and took actions to join the peer group, they were at first rejected by group members. Membership is more than a sense of belonging and close connection, it also refers to a boundary of the group (Boldermo, 2020; Koivula & Hännikäinen, 2017). While social symbols, rituals, rules, and routines are used by group members to enhance membership and strengthen the group as a whole, they are also used to distinguish members from non-members and emphasise the concept of hierarchy (Boldermo, 2020; Koivula & Hännikäinen, 2017; Mortlock, 2015). Since newcomers do not belong to the group, that means these social conventions of the community are inapplicable to them, and this inevitably leads to exclusion (Koivula & Hännikäinen, 2017; Schmidt, Rakoczy, & Tomasello, 2012). It is a basic need for group insiders to reject initial entry of outsiders to protect their existing membership. Therefore, initial access to social participation in the group is hard for newcomers (Koivula & Hännikäinen, 2017).

Exclusion from peers at a young age is normally non-verbal given their tendency in bodily expression (Hännikäinen, 1999; Mortlock, 2015). This is what happened to Julie and Taylor when they were rejected by peers. Although Abigail's moving backwards when Julie also attempted to hold the doorknob can be an instinctive response of uncertainty, Aaron's conventional rejecting gestures including shaking head, shaking hands, leaning backward to the teachers, and turning his body against Julie clearly demonstrated resistance. These showed

his intention of drawing a line between him and Julie, the newcomer. Leaning closer to teacher Kris showed his intimate relationship with Kris and created a concept of togetherness between them. Meanwhile, it generated a sense of otherness on Julie's side because of the invisible line that Aaron drew with his persistent resistance to this interaction.

As for Taylor, her peers' obvious negative reactions also outrightly demonstrated their rejection of her impulsive physical gestures and further reciprocal interactions. These physical contacts which appeared "aggressive" to other children were against the social rules and norms (for example, gentle hands to others) that were reinforced in the peer group. Since Taylor was unable to share the same understanding of these social rules and norms and perform appropriate social actions that all members agreed upon, she was disqualified as a member in the group. This phenomenon was also found in the study of Ree, Alvestad, and Johansson (2019). Children strive to create a community with those insiders, but not outsiders (Corsaro, 2003). Since Taylor was not yet a group member, being rejected was inevitable.

4.1.4 Embrace peer rejection

Two transitioning children seemed well-prepared for peer exclusion as there was no discernible negative emotions such as frustration or stress observed in their responses. For instance, it was very unlikely an adult would turn down Julie's offer of passing a toy; however, she was refused by her peers a few times when she did that at Rainbow; Julie, surprisingly showed no negative emotions to the rejection from her peers. A possibility to explain this could be that transitioning children developed an understanding that initial social entry to a group is difficult, and it takes time (Koivula & Hännikäinen, 2017).

Regardless of whether Julie and Taylor understood this or not, persistence is clearly shown in their repetitive behaviours. When rejected by Matthew and Julie, no negative emotions were captured on Taylor. Instead, she left the dyad and came back when there was another chance. Such physical gestures and persistence did not disappear until the third week of observation. When Julie was refused by Aaron for touching his body and passing him a toy, she responded in a calm manner and repeated doing that a number of times. However, unlike Taylor, Julie was noticed not touching a peer's body in the following observation weeks after she was rejected by Aaron a few times at the first week, which indicated her understanding of what Aaron did not like. Young children's acquisition of social knowledge is not only sourced from what peers do or like, but also from what peers do not do or dislike (Dalli, 2003). This might explain the phenomenon that Julie received fewer rejected social bids from peers than Taylor during the entire observation period.

4.1.5 Social acceptance from group peers

Although it is common that newcomers encounter "initial resistance" from peers, such resistance lasts only for a short period (Corsaro, 1985). In this present study, the two transitioning children did not always get rejection from peers; they also received acceptance by the peer group. Although Aaron refused Julie in many ways, his gesture of passing the rattle back to Julie with a lean-forward posture on another occasion strongly suggested his positive attitude and willingness to interact with Julie at that time. Likewise, taking over the puzzle piece that Julie offered and returning more also showed Amelia's acceptance to Julie's contribution and participation in the game. The back-and-forth interaction implied an important social rule in peer groups: turn-taking. It is the receiver's imitation to the giver's actions, which was called by Piaget (1965) as 'acts of community' (as cited in Rayna, 2001, p.111).

Children's transition experience in ECE is a process of adapting into the group environment (Dalli, 2003). This required children to learn how to interact with peers in a socially appropriate manner, particularly around ownership and use of toys. For example, Matthew insisted on taking a book back but returned it to Taylor after reading. This gesture emphasised multiple rules of ownership of shared toys in ECE: (1) When more than one person desires a toy, the first person who has the toy in hand is prioritised to play with it; (2) However, because toys in ECE should be shared, the rule of turn-taking applies in this context; (3) These rules are agreed upon by all group members, who are obligated to follow them. Matthew's role modelling behaviours could be referred to as "guided participation" by Rogoff, Mistry, Göncü, Mosier (as cited in Dalli, 2003, p.96). As a transitioning child, Taylor was lacking social experience in ECE, thus was a 'less experienced' social actor; and she learned these rules from Matthew, who was more experienced in this matter.

Following the same social rules and routines with peers are significant for transitioning children to be accepted as group members. Another example is Taylor passionately greeting others in the same way Zoe did to her. Her friendly smiles nurtured affiliative feelings and encouraged peers to accept her and bond with her. Her active participation enabled her to take part in shared routines. More importantly, she turned her greeting behaviour into a meaningful ritual, as she did that to everyone daily, which created a friendly atmosphere in the peer group. Peer culture is co-constructed by all children who are involved in it (Corsaro, 2018). Children's participation in the construction of social culture of the peer group helps to reshape the social values (Corsaro, 2018). In Taylor's case, her input transformed the peer culture to be more inclusive.

4.1.6 Experienced peers' conciliatory strategies

Peer conflict clearly came along with the social involvement of transitioning children in the peer group. Along with separation anxiety, sharing props and play space with peers can also be stressful for transitioning children because of them lacking experience. However, once Julie and Taylor were seen as part of the group, other group members played a vital role in consolidating the membership of Julie and Taylor through effective negotiation. For example, when Aaron realised Julie wanted the cone in his hand, he resisted giving it to her. However, he solved the problem by offering Julie another cone. Despite the fact that he was unable to satisfy Julie's need entirely, he showed concern for Julie's feelings. Such awareness and problem-solving strategy indicated sophisticated social skills (Engdahl, 2011; Mortlock, 2015).

Sophisticated social understandings were demonstrated by other peers at other times. In observation #4, Nathan, a slightly older child from the toddler room was invited into the infant room as a visitor and intervened in an interaction where he facilitated Julie's inclusion. Although he was not initially involved in the interaction, he stepped in to intervene as a third party. As a more experienced peer, Nathan demonstrated through his actions that when group rules failed (in this instance, when more than one person desires a toy, the first person who has the toy in hand is prioritised to play with it), the best way was to solve the problem with negotiation. From a social perspective, Nathan's 'including' negotiation strategy not only nurtured Julie's affiliation to and rights within the group, but also reinforced her membership as her right was defended. When membership of a new child is identified, others in the same group share the responsibility to assist and include the new child (Ree, Alvestad, & Johansson, 2019). Young children's social power is demonstrated through their knowledge of props (Arnott, 2018). Through offering Julie an alternative, Nathan, as an experienced peer, helped to lift Julie's position in the peer hierarchy skilfully, a skill that Julie had not yet

mastered as a transitioning child. According to Arnott (2018) and Dalli (2003), such negotiation skills are peaceful and contribute to the construction of a friendly peer culture.

Another conciliatory strategy was unexpectedly used by Taylor who was still adjusting herself into the peer group. When Zoe barged into the play space, Taylor was obviously unprepared for the uninvited interruption. However, she showed no irritation, instead Taylor walked away quietly and came back when the play material was available again. Since her responses afterwards were consistent with this, it was reasonable to infer that Taylor was trying to avoid conflicts between her and Zoe by taking turns to use the play materials. According to Engdahl (2011), turn-taking is a sophisticated social strategy that children adopted to fit in the social environment after assessing their situation. It is in meaningful peer social experiences that young children learn to appropriate their social behaviours and develop self-regulation, a crucial element of socialisation (Arnott, 2018). Spivak (2016) emphasised that such socially sophisticated skills help to reduce conflicts between peers and lead to reciprocity. Solving social problems by resorting to effective social strategies assist transitioning children to get access to the group, adjust themselves to group routines, and locate their position in the hierarchy (Boldermo, 2020).

It is worth noting that rejection, accepting rejection, peer acceptance, and conflicts negotiation are an ongoing process. Through this, children enrich their social knowledge, develop interactive skills, and construct peer culture in a group setting.

4.2. Pedagogies for an affiliative social milieu

The second main theme is the pedagogies that teachers implemented to create an affiliative social milieu at Rainbow. These facilitating strategies reflected to what extent the

teaching pedagogies at Rainbow supported a smooth adjustment for those transitioning children. Most of these practices facilitated transitioning children's initial social participation in peer group which arguably plays a primary role in nurturing a sense of affiliation and togetherness. However, some of the strategies might have negatively influenced how the children constructed group culture. Pointing out these strategies here is not intended to criticise the teachers involved in this current thesis, especially as there is so little guidance from Ministry documents. Rather the intention is to improve practices in supporting infants and toddlers during the critical transitioning period.

4.2.1 Promoting the feeling of 'being together'

The sense of being together was strong in the infant room of Rainbow. Teachers promoted togetherness by emphasising the sameness and closeness that shared between transitioning children and their peers. For instance, the family photo board vividly illustrated the similarities of each child and their families. By putting photos of every infant in a single, accessible display and responding to children's interests in the photos sensitively (e.g. Kris telling Taylor whose photo she was pointing at), teachers not only introduced new members to the peer group, but also instilled the concept of community among the group. As outlined in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017), introducing family photos into a group care environment helps young children to make connections between their families and the learning community, which foster a strong sense of belonging.

Also, it is significant for teachers to identify the symbols of togetherness which contributed to the reinforcement of membership in the peer group (Boldermo, 2020; Degotardi & Pearson, 2014). For instance, the practice of inviting Taylor to have lunch with her peers at the same table fostered a sense of intimacy. Taylor was encouraged to sit together

with experienced peers and to participate in the lunch rituals. By witnessing experienced peer Amelia volunteering to take a leader's role in the ritual at lunch time, Taylor learned that appropriate social manners link to their participation in a ritual. For example, to take the leadership of the lunch ritual, Amelia had to show well-managed social behaviours at the table and convinced teachers that she is a good role model to other less experienced peers. Rituals are an important part of social life and they help children to develop social understandings in the group (Singer, 2002). Through involving a child to participate in rituals of a peer group, teachers empower the child to learn from experienced peers the ways to self-regulate unpredictable "aggressive" behaviours, to follow rules and routines, and to learn the social structures within peer groups (Singer, 2002). While transitioning children familiar themselves in rituals with the support of teachers and experienced peers, they feel less stress and feel more comfortable to their adjusting situation, which strengthen their sense of groupness (Degotardi & Pearson, 2014). Being together with peers and performing prosocial behaviours would be a good start for transitioning children to begin their socialisation and adjust themselves into a new learning environment.

4.2.2. Facilitating cross-age interactions

The small gate between the infant room and the toddler room seems more like a symbol of separation in the room than actually separating infants from toddlers physically. Although there might be few opportunities for infants to visit the toddler space due to consideration of safety, toddlers, however, were often granted permission to be visitors in the infant room. This guarantees cross-age social interactions on a frequent basis. Moreover, the older toddlers provided social modelling and behaved as experts in the social milieu at times. The example given earlier in this chapter of Nathan is a good illustration of this.

4.2.3 Teachers' roles of being active observers and 'passive' intervenor

The strategy of active observation and 'passive' intervention means that teachers observe children's developing peer conflicts with sensitivity but choose to step back and leave children to work out their own problems, unless there is a possibility of physical aggression. For a long time, preventing peer conflicts is an important task for teachers in ECE (Clarke, McLaughlin, & Aspden, 2019). To prevent potential conflicts, young children are either provided the same props for each or they are arranged to play separately (Degotardi & Pearson, 2014). The focus of such arrangement is more like to avoid aggression than to promote social interaction (Clarke, McLaughlin, & Aspden, 2019). However, the possible risk of teachers intervening in children's conflicts too often and too early is that children are not only deprived of the learning opportunities to solve problems but teachers' intervention provokes greater aggression in the children (Singer, 2002). According to the observation of Singer (2002), children showed great capability to address social issues between them and their peers through conciliatory strategies. It is important for teachers to share an understanding that conflicts are a part of children's social life. Peer conflicts are not always negative as young children are good problem-solvers themselves (Clarke, McLaughlin, & Aspden, 2019; Singer, 2002). On the contrary, conflicts play a vital role in children's social learning (Clarke, McLaughlin, & Aspden, 2019; Degotardi & Pearson, 2014).

In a communal learning context, conflicts between children are inevitable. While transitioning children enter into a new group, the exposure of peer conflicts empowers them to express their own perspectives and allows group members to get to know them. More importantly, transitioning children also learn to take account of the thoughts and needs of others, which are different from their own (Clarke, McLaughlin, & Aspden, 2019; Degotardi & Pearson, 2014). The exchange of perspectives and desires enables young children to

appreciate social preferences of their peers which lays a foundation to develop togetherness (Degotardi, 2014). It is obvious that such ability is especially important for transitioning children to enter social groups.

The ‘step back’ tactic that was implemented by teachers at Rainbow perceives peer conflict as a learning event which allows children to identify the problems between them and one another and find solutions to address the issue. This strategy is consistent with the findings in the study of Clarke, McLaughlin, and Aspden (2019). When peer conflicts occur, it is ideal that teachers’ intervention tends to be child-oriented (Clarke, McLaughlin, & Aspden, 2019). The ‘gentle hand’ strategy presented in the next section 4.2.4 vividly illustrated how teachers Kris and Raewyn engaged two transitioning children and their peers in mediation through being close and providing them verbal and non-verbal languages to express needs and appreciate the emotions of themselves and others. In this way, young children are given tools to develop social skills such as emotional regulation and views-taken (Clarke, McLaughlin, & Aspden, 2019).

Through the repetition of addressing social issues with peers, infants and toddlers constantly refine their social skills and enhance social competence, and this process is perceived as the value of conflicts by Degotardi and Pearson (2014). The implementation of this strategy in teaching practices at Rainbow affirmed transitioning children’s social agency; they were empowered to play a primary role in their own peer experience. In other words, the community was a space where transitioning children and their experienced peers were able to identify their social roles, practice social skills, construct social meaning, and develop the concept of peer relations. Peer relations and peer culture initiated and maintained by children themselves without adult intervention increased the sense of togetherness.

4.2.4 ‘Gentle hand’ - empowering children’s social skills through verbal and non-verbal communication

While infants and toddlers were given ample time and space to enact social exchanges with peers by themselves, they were also given tools to enhance their communicative and interpretive skills. It is a common practice at Rainbow that teachers role model prosocial bodily movement to young children with language support. For example, Kris shared the way she facilitated Taylor’s physical contact to peers during transition. *“I try and sit close and I show her with my hand, how to use gentle hands and I remind her with my words.”* (Interview #2).

Many studies investigating children’s peer social behaviours revealed that not only are children active social actors, but also those under three years old tend to be engaged by and express themselves through bodily expression and construct their own interpretation from the responses of others (Kyratzis, 2004; Mortlock, 2015; Namy, Vallas, & Knight-Schwarz, 2008; Singer, 2002). Singer (2002) highlighted that children tend to solve their problems in non-verbal approaches when they are very young. Consistency was found in current research. When infants Matthew and Julie both failed to claim toys back from peers with their hand gestures and babbling, older child Abigail avoided hurting Julie by successfully communicating with Julie in her clear verbal ‘watch out’. Therefore, while teachers try to assist infants and toddlers to address issues between them and their peers, it is an ideal practice to align body language with linguistic expression to visualise the part of talking and the process of meaning-making. In this way, it is easier for non-verbal children to make sense of the consequence of their actions and its influence on the emotions of peers, which helps to grow empathy (Ministry of Education, 2019). For example, teacher Raewyn verbalised her thinking and actions while she was encouraging Amelia to return a toy car to Julie.

Combining verbal expression with bodily gestures that are easy to understand, Raewyn made it clear what Amelia's action meant to Julie.

Furthermore, teachers facilitating infants and toddlers in role modelling and language support should help to reduce the misinterpretation and misunderstanding between infants and toddlers which often result in termination of peer play (e.g. Amelia misunderstood Julie's hand gestures in their puzzle games). In this way, children's social agency in their own group culture is affirmed. What needs to be mindful is that before and while teachers assist young children in peer interactions, it is best for teachers to share the same logic of children's behaviours to make sure assistance from them benefits the continuation of children's play (Dalli, 2003; Girolametto, Weitzman, & Greenberg, 2004; Singer, 2002).

Results revealed that trained teachers tended to use more language support to scaffold the communication between children and their peers when they focused on facilitating peer interactions rather than adult-child interactions (Clarke, McLaughlin, & Aspden, 2019; Girolametto, Weitzman, & Greenberg, 2004). In the research of Clarke, McLaughlin and Aspden (2019), teacher participants highly valued the use of those children-oriented scaffolding strategies when peer conflicts take place. With the use of these strategies, children are empowered to address social problems in their own ways and it is easier for them to accept the results which are achieved by both parties of the disputes. No one is judged and labelled by the third party – teachers, and therefore, children's social dignity and social confidence are well-protected (Clarke, McLaughlin, & Aspden, 2019).

While teachers remind 'cuddle-enthusiasts' such as Zoe and Taylor to use gentle hands towards other children, this reminder implicitly points out the fact that both hug

providers (Zoe or Taylor) and hug receivers (such as Julie), are in the same group and share the same group norms – ‘gentle hands’ is one of the appropriate and acceptable forms of physical contact for others. By applying the same social rule to both established group members (Zoe) and transitioning children (Taylor), the role modelling strategy also emphasised the equivalence of transitioning children’s membership, social identity, and group position as their peers. Therefore, Dalli (2003) advocated that it is important for teachers to be reflective about their teaching practices and the social meanings that their practices carry as their actions affect children’s social understanding enormously. However, on one occasion where Zoe was encouraged to stand in front of Julie before giving her a hug, as opposed to hugging her from the back, the teacher changed Julie’s position to face Zoe instead. The inconsistency of the teacher’s verbal statement and action may have exposed the teacher’s subconscious perception that Julie as a newcomer should adapt to the group instead of Zoe who is already a group member.

4.2.5 Be mindful of saying ‘This is your friend’

Lastly, there is an interesting social phenomenon noticed during observation: that teachers have a tendency to introduce a new child to other group members by saying ‘This is your friend’ even if it is their first time that the children have met each other. While the use of ‘friend’ may reveal the anticipation of teachers to initiate the friendship between two children, there is a problem. We know little about how very young children perceive friendship. Corsaro (2003) noted that older children base friendship on doing things together and did not use the same criteria as adults. Therefore, there was a potential risk of teacher introducing a new child with the use of ‘friend’ as it might hinder children’s autonomy to identify their own friendships and social positions in the group. For example, when there is peer rejection, it causes confusion for the new child about the roles of friends. This in turn might affect

children's social identity, social understanding, and how they construct their own group culture.

4.3. Responding to the initial research questions

By synthesising two main themes discussed above, I now respond to my initial research questions.

1. What strategies does a transitioning infant/toddler use to affiliate with the peer group?

Two transitioning children both showed willingness for social involvement in the group through observation at the onset of their transition. Observing experienced peers allows transitioning children to read cues and interpret the meanings of peers' bodily gestures. In this way, they are able to respond accordingly and appropriately which is more socially acceptable to others. Also, observing the prosocial behaviours of experienced peers helps transitioning children to learn the rules, rituals, discourses, and social structure of their peer groups. Such social knowledge is important for children's adjustment into a new social environment.

Observation is not the only strategy transitioning children use to affiliate with the peer group. Two transitioning children signalled their social desires to participate in joint activities and improved their social status in the peer group by being attractive playmates in the social group. However, they chose different strategies to accomplish their goals. While one child identified toys or props as good resources to initiate joint play with peers, and create shared social experiences and understandings, the other child expressed her affiliation to and shared the same emotions with peers by being humorous. In terms of physical proximity, the first

child seemed to initiate more successful social interactions with peers by being close to peers than the second child's making intimate physical contacts which might overwhelm peers.

By observing experienced peers, engaging in shared games, bonding emotionally with peers, and following the rules of the group, transitioning children appeared to take on social norms, values, principles, and peer group culture and became attractive playmates. Their identity switched from potential intruders to group members.

2. In what ways does an infant-toddler peer group enable a sense of togetherness for a child transitioning from home to an early childcare context?

Transitioning from home to ECE might be the first time that infants and toddlers have experienced inclusion and exclusion (Boldermo, 2020). Membership means more than the closeness of group members; it also means drawing boundaries between group members and outsiders (Koivula & Hännikäinen, 2017). For this reason, transitioning children who were going through adjustment were at first identified as 'outsiders' or potential 'intruders' by group members. As a result, their social participation was initially rejected by group members at times. Rejection from peers contributed to the transitioning children's socialisation as they not only learned what peers liked but also what they disliked. With guided participation, transitioning children enriched their social knowledge of the rules, routines, and norms of the group, which also facilitated their adjustment of being a member in the group.

Conciliatory negotiation is considered as a mature problem-solving skill to reach a result of reciprocity (Spivak, 2016). In this research, it was sophisticatedly used by the experienced children to lower the possibility of peer conflicts in play. Negotiating the

transitioning children's rights nurtured an inclusiveness in the group and reinforced their social identity and membership in the group which assisted a sense of belonging. Through reciprocal interactions, transitioning children were able to construct social meanings together with peers and made their contribution to the transformation of peer culture. For instance, when Taylor was greeted by Zoe with great passion, Taylor learned the social meaning of doing this. In turn, she did that to her peers at their arrivals. Her hospitality and friendliness introduced a sense of community to the group, which contributed to shape the peer culture. In other words, transitioning children's collective participation innovatively contributed to peer culture transformation, which fostered a sense of togetherness and affiliation in peer group (Koivula & Hännikäinen, 2017; Mortlock, 2015). Since peer culture has a fundamental influence on the attitudes of established peers; the changes took place in the peer group, in turn, socially, emotionally and cognitively affected transitioning children's peer relationships (Boldermo, 2020; Corsaro, 2018).

3. What do adults do to scaffold a transitioning child to affiliate with the peer group?

First, the introduction of children's family photos visualised the concept of being together by placing children's photos next to each other and making the display accessible for all children. Teachers were also responsive to children's curiosity about their peers. Moreover, transitioning children's participation in important rituals such as sitting at the lunch table with experienced peers facilitates their social learning and reinforces a sense of togetherness which laid a solid foundation for the growth of peer affiliation among young children.

Second, children's social agency was valued by the teaching team and therefore children were empowered to initiate, maintain, and transform their social relations not only with age-mates but also with older and more experienced children. In this study, while transitioning children interacted with peers in group, they not only developed vital knowledge and skills which are essential for their socialisation, but they also contributed in constructing social meanings with assistance from peers (e.g. Taylor's greetings to her peers contributed to peer culture construction). Given their input in the transformation of the peer group, there grew a sense of togetherness and as a result, they were seen as part of the group.

Third, peer conflict is an important part of children's socialisation. Infants and toddlers are as much as active problem-solvers as older children are (Singer, 2002). They develop self-regulation, prosocial behaviours, and social competence through negotiation in peer conflicts (Clarke, McLaughlin, & Aspden, 2019). Teachers perceive peer conflicts as learning opportunities for young children and adopt child-oriented scaffolding practices empower children to construct their own social theories about the social structure they try to fit it.

Fourth, while necessary intervention is required, the combination of role modelling behaviours and language instruction scaffolds children's social exchanges with peers. Children are prone to solve their own social problems non-verbally (Singer, 2002). Teachers who verbalise their actions such as 'gentle hands' assists children to understand the feelings and thoughts of others which is a key aspect of empathy and view-taking ability (Clarke, McLaughlin, & Aspden, 2019; Degotardi & Pearson, 2014). In this way, children are equipped to interact with each other in a more socially appropriate manner which benefits their group affiliation.

Since misinterpretation may hinder inclusive or peaceful peer interactions of infants and toddlers, teachers should help young children to interpret the meanings of peers' actions. This requires teachers to be fully engaged and to use the same logic of children when conflicting interactions occurred (Dalli, 2003; Singer, 2002). In this way, teachers are able to interpret children's social gestures and deliver the contextualised meanings for those young minds.

Finally, although teachers in this research scaffolded transitioning children's affiliation with the peer group, some strategies potentially lacked sensitivity. This might hinder transitioning children's adjustment to the peer group. When children are supported with the role model strategy, it is crucial for teachers to keep their verbal expressions and actions consistent. For example, while the teacher instructed Zoe to stand in the front before hugging Julie so Julie could see what was coming to her. The teacher should not have turned Julie to face Zoe which was opposite to what she said. Otherwise, misinterpretation might harm the social identity of children, particularly those who are experiencing transitioning and have not found their positions in the peer group. In addition, when adults introduce two young children using the term 'friend', those teachers might view it as a conventional expression which may help to initiate the children's friendship; however, in the present study it deprived the children of their right to enact their social agency (i.e. in choosing their own friends).

Chapter 5: Limitations

This current research has limitations. First, because of the restrictive criteria for main participants (i.e. very young children under three at the point of transition into ECE), there was a small sample of two children, and their peers and teachers recruited in this study. What this means is that there is limited generalisability. Notwithstanding, a focus on just two children has enabled a more in-depth investigation than what would be possible with a larger-scale study. Significant family-related factors of the main participants, such as cultural background, ethnicity, family structure, parenting style, sibling, and gender were not considered as influential factors. There was also a lack of views from parents with regards to their children's transitioning experiences in ECE. Although parents might not have many opportunities to witness their children's social exchanges with peers in ECE, their observation of children's social behaviours at home after attendance in ECE could be valuable to evaluate children's adjustment.

Second, the early childcare centre involved in this study was located in a major city of New Zealand, where most families participating in this childcare centre are socio-economically privileged. The sample may not be geographically representative, and it affects the generalisation to some extent. Third, the entire length of the observation period for each main child participant was only four weeks due to the time limit of this thesis. Data collected in this short period may not capture the whole transition life of two transitioning children. Therefore, further longitudinal studies with a larger sample located in different geographical regions should be conducted in future. With a larger sample, consideration can be given to the impacts of familial factors on very young children's transition into ECE.

Third, there are also some aspects that may have an effect on the validity of the research. This research is insider research as it was conducted in a place where I teach. While insider research has been criticised by some scholars because it results in a lack of objectivity. Proponents of insider research state that the subjectivity it enables leads to an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences. Subjectivity can be questionable when there is a sole researcher; however, this was mitigated by my supervisor's access to the data and the continuing process of probing my assumptions and biases at fortnightly meetings. These meetings, coupled with my reflections in my field journal, contribute to descriptive and interpretive validity. To further address this issue, triangulation of data sources was implemented. These consisted of quantitative data and qualitative data with different methods. Quantitative data were event recordings of gestures using a schedule. Qualitative data included video footage and written vignettes of significant moments. In the process of data analysis, quantitative data and qualitative data were cross-examined to increase the validity.

Chapter 6: Contributions

The main purpose of conducting this current research is to deepen our knowledge of the peer social world of children under two years old. Although a great body of research exists which has investigated children's peer relations, friendships, and peer cultures over decades, most of the studies focused on pre-schoolers or primary schoolers (Degotardi & Pearson, 2014). For most young children, their first official transition takes place when they are enrolled in ECE from home for the first time. However, there is little literature to explore the peer social experiences of this critical stage, in particular of those who are under two. Since there is a lack of knowledge of how infants and toddlers adapt themselves into a peer group, in particular in a New Zealand context, there is limited guidance for teachers and families to scaffold this important experience. As transitioning from home to ECE is experienced by a large number of infants and toddlers in New Zealand and their socio-emotional wellbeing is highlighted in *He Mapuna te Tamaiti* (Ministry of Education, 2019), further investigation into these initiatives is a matter of urgency. This thesis shed light on the socio-emotional development of infants and toddlers during the particularly critical transition period. Furthermore, while an adult-child relationship is oriented in most studies, this thesis made a contribution to assessing the value of peer-peer relationship in children's social life.

Using an ethnographic approach, I was able to observe the children's peer group, living among them, and experiencing their social life. The use of participatory observation empowered me to witness how they construct their own group culture. Previously in the thesis, I presented a view that insider research might be controversial and accused of lacking in objectivity (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Kirova, Massing, Cleghorn, & Prochner, 2017). This view is arguably contentious when the act of teaching requires teachers to observe and make sense of what is happening in their service, which is indubitably insider-research. As

such, this thesis contributes to the growing credibility of insider research as a valid means of understanding phenomena. I benefited from my dual roles (teacher and researcher) as it enabled me to see in-depth into different layers of children's peer relations and the social world that they lived in. The multiple perspectives enormously enhanced the quality of my interpretation.

This current research collected quantitative and qualitative raw data in various forms including observation field notes, audio recordings, social bids statistics, and semi-structured interviews. The triangulation of data sources further strengthened the comprehensiveness and credibility of data in this study. It shed light on the peer culture and social world of children under the age of two and increases wide awareness on this critical issue. I sincerely hope this will encourage further studies on relevant topics.

Chapter 7: Summary and Conclusion

There is an increasing number of children enrolled in ECE before they turn two years old in New Zealand. For those infants and toddlers, transition is a crucial stage for them as it is their first time to embark on a social journey with peers in a group setting. There is concern from parents with regard to their children's settlement in group life. It is of importance for parents to see their children to have a smooth adjustment in early childcare centre.

The importance of peer relationship to young children adapting into a new environment is overlooked these years. There is little literature focusing on young children's social and emotional wellbeing during the critical transition period. Researchers have focused on children's peer culture only recently, yet few have examined infant-toddler peer culture. Although infants and toddlers are considered to be active social agents in a growing body of research (for example see Corsaro, 2018 and Engdahl, 2011), there is little literature to investigate in what ways they enact their social agency to nurture a sense of affiliative togetherness among the peer social group. It follows that peer group entry at the time of transition into an ECE has not been widely studied. Even though most children's first official transition experience takes place when they are adjusting to their early childcare centres from a home environment, in most literature transition research has usually been interested in children's experiences from preschool to primary school.

With little exploration of the social life of infants and toddlers during the critical transition stage in the academic sector of New Zealand and worldwide, there is a lack of information for teachers and ECE to guide children and their families through adjustment. Although there are caregiving support systems for these transitioning children, most of them have a focus on adult-child relationship which disregarded children's autonomy in social

learning with peer support. I have assisted many children to transition from home to an ECE environment and I understand what a challenging experience it can be to children, parents, and early childcare teachers.

Therefore, I am curious of how young children support each other to go through this critical transitioning experience. I dedicated myself to conduct this research, hoping to find my answers through working with a group of infants, toddler, and their teachers in ECE. The present thesis set out to examine the strategies that transitioning children used to gain entry into their new peer group and establish a sense of togetherness with them.

Specifically, my first question asked about the strategies the transitioning infant/toddlers used to affiliate with the peer group. The findings showed that transitioning children demonstrated willingness for social involvement through observing peers. They enriched their social understandings of peers' actions, rituals and social discourses in the peer group by observing experienced peers. This is a key element if children are to fit in a new environment appropriately. They also adopted other strategies to develop their affiliative relationships with peers. While one child tended to engage in joint activities based around toys, another one involved herself into play by showing a sense of humour. In terms of bodily proximity, the two children performed differently, with one preferring to be near peers, observing them as a precursor to interaction. The other child was adventurous in her attempts to demonstrate physical affection to peers, such as hugging them. This strategy was met with mixed success, with peers seeming to find it overwhelming at times.

The second question in the present thesis asked in what ways an infant-toddler peer group enables a sense of togetherness for a child transitioning from home to an early childcare

context. It seemed from the data that the onus of gaining a sense of togetherness or gaining entry into the peer group seemed to be on the transitioning children, who often initiated interactions. This was so, even if their strategies were subtle, such as conveying an interest by hovering nearby. Their bids for inclusion were met with a mixture of acceptance and rejection, to which they responded with resilience and perseverance. Over time, the transitioning children took on some of the group norms and ways of being such as searching for alternatives when they also desired a toy in a peer's hand, or greeting others with words and smiley faces instead of an unpredictable hug. On the journey of they become group members, conciliatory problem-solving skills are required to settle conflicts with peers. Such skills are beneficial for children's socio-emotional competence and comprehensive development.

The final question sought to address how adults might scaffold a transitioning child's affiliation with the peer group. The data showed that teachers were creating an atmosphere of being together in the learning community by displaying family photos and inviting transitioning children to participate in meal rituals with peers. These strategies helped transitioning children to develop affiliative emotions to their peer groups. Transitioning children's social interactions should not only be with agemates but also with experienced and older peers as they learn with guided participation. Since young children are intrinsically driven to engage in peer social experiences, it is crucial for teachers to appreciate their social autonomy and to empower their social agency to construct meaning about their peer social culture through observing actively and intervening "passively". Peer conflicts are meaningful social events for young children to refine interactive skills and develop prosocial dispositions which are important for their socio-emotional competence in a long run. When necessary intervention is required, teachers are suggested to share the same logic of young children and

role model pro-social behaviours with language support. On the other hand, the overuse of ‘friend’ and the inconsistency of teachers’ verbal expression and their intervening actions might deprive infants and toddlers from developing their social identity from peer interactions and hinder their transitioning adjustment.

It is clearly stated in *He Mapuna te Tamaiti* (Ministry of Education, 2019) that children’s socio-emotional development is of the utmost importance. Their transition from home to ECE is the first step for them to embark on this journey of socialisation and experience the peer social world. It should be a pleasant experience for those wonderful little human creatures and for their teachers. It is a serious issue we should all care about. After all, children are the future leaders of our society and their socio-emotional wellbeing and competence matter.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Information sheet and consent form for organisation



The peer social world of infants and toddlers during transition into early childcare settings

INFORMATION SHEET FOR ORGANISATIONS

Thank you for your interest in this project. Please read this information before deciding whether or not your organisation will take part. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to take part, thank you for considering my request.

Who am I?

My name is Peiling Ruan and I am a Masters student in Education at Victoria University of Wellington. This research project is work towards my thesis.

What is the aim of the project?

This project investigates how the peer relations of infants and toddlers contribute to their social and emotional well-being or sense of belonging during transition from home to an early childcare service (ECE). Your organisation's participation will support this research by contributing to further and deepen our current understanding and insight of young children's sense of belonging and how peer socialisation might contribute successful transition into an ECE setting. In addition, it also makes a potentially useful contribution to the study of peer culture. This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee #28903.

How can you help?

If you agree to take part, I will interview your employees. I will ask them questions about children's social behaviours in peer group. The interviews will take 30 minutes. Employees will complete the interviews during work time, with your permission. The interviews will take place at a closed staff room at your centre. Each individual participant will be asked to provide consent before their involvement in the research. I will audio record the interview

with the permission of the participants and write it up later. The interviews will not be confidential but individual participants will be de-identified in the research outputs.

If you agree to take part, I will observe your employees. I will be observing them as they interact with, scaffold, and intervene observed children. The observations will occur on floor at your centre. The observations will not have an impact on your employees' work. Each individual participant will be asked to provide consent before their involvement in the research. I will video record the observation(s) with the permission of the participants and will transcribe it later. The observation will not be confidential but individual participants will be de-identified in the research outputs.

If you agree to take part, I will collect research-relevant resources such as learning stories and teaching planning from your employees. The collection will occur with permission from individual participants and your organisation.

What will happen to the information the participants give?

This research is confidential. This means that the researcher named below will be aware of the identity of your organisation but your organisation will not be revealed in any reports, presentations, or public documentation. However, you should be aware that in small projects the identity of your organisation might be obvious to others.

Only my supervisor and I will have access to the original data. The notes of observation, summaries, interview transcripts, and any recordings will be kept securely and destroyed on 30 June 2021.

Be aware that the identities and contributions of participants will be kept confidential from your organisation.

What will the project produce?

The information from my research will be used in my Masters thesis, academic publications and conferences. I will also provide your organisation with a report summarising the results of the research.

If you accept this invitation, what are the rights of your organisation?

You do not have to accept this invitation if you don't want to. If you do decide that your organisation will participate, you have the right to:

- ask any questions about the study at any time;

- withdraw your organisation's participation from the study prior data analysis on 30 November 2020, however, individual participants retain the right to decide if their data will be withdrawn;
- be able to read a report of this research.

If you have any questions or problems, who can you contact?

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor:

Student:

Name: Peiling Ruan

University email address:

This content is unavailable

Supervisor:

Name: Anita Mortlock

Role: Supervisor

School: Education

Phone: This content is unavailable

University email address:

This content is unavailable

Human Ethics Committee information

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Convenor of the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee: Associate Professor Judith Loveridge, email hec@vuw.ac.nz or telephone +64-4-463 6028.

The peer social world of infants and toddlers during transition into early childcare settings

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE (ORGANISATION)

This consent form will be held for five years.

Researcher: Peiling Ruan, Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington.

- I have read the Information Sheet and the project has been explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.
- I agree that my organisation will take part.

I understand that:

- I may withdraw this organisation from this study at any point prior data analysis 30 November 2020, and the information provided up to this date by members of the organisation will be used in the project.
- Any information the participants provide will be included in a final report but the transcripts, observation notes and recordings will be de-identified;
- The identities of the participants will not remain confidential to the researcher.
- I understand that the results will be used for a Masters thesis, academic publications and presented to conferences.
- The name of my organisation will not be used in reports and utmost care will be taken not to disclose any information that would identify the organisation.
- I would like to receive a copy of summary of the final report and have added Yes ☐ No ☐ my email address below.

Signature of participant: _____

Name of participant: _____

Date: _____

Contact details: _____

Appendix B: Ethics approval from Victoria University of Wellington



VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF
WELLINGTON
TE HERENGA WAKA

Phone 0-4-463 6028
Email judith.loveridge@vuw.ac.nz

TO	Peiling Ruan
FROM	Associate Professor Judith Loveridge, Convenor, Human Ethics Committee
DATE	22 September 2020
PAGES	1
SUBJECT	Ethics Approval Number: 28903 Title: The peer social world of infants and toddlers during transition into early childcare settings

Thank you for your application for ethical approval, which has now been considered by the Human Ethics Committee.

Your application has been approved from the above date and this approval is valid for three years. If your data collection is not completed by this date you should apply to the Human Ethics Committee for an extension to this approval.

Best wishes with the research.

Kind regards,

Judith Loveridge
Convenor, Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee

Appendix C: Introduction of my thesis (display on a wall of the main entrance of Rainbow)

The peer social world of infants and toddlers during transition into early childcare

Introduction

Self-image

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Who am I?

Nihao! Hello! Kia ora, whanau! My name is Peiling Ruan and I am a permanent teacher at this centre. As you may aware that I am also a Masters student in Education at Victoria University of Wellington. I am currently doing a research project to work towards my thesis. The research topic is *The peer social world of infants and toddlers during transition into early childcare*.

What is the aim of the project?

This project investigates how the peer relations of infants and toddlers contribute to their social and emotional well-being or sense of belonging during transition from home to an early childcare service (ECE).

How do I proceed this project?

Every Thursday between October and November, I will come in as a researcher to observe social behaviours and peer interactions of children whose families have given consent to participate in the project. I may not be able to invite all families to participate in this research given ethical consideration. If you have not received an information sheet and consent form for participation, your child will not be observed. If you have received invitation, please refer to the information sheet and consent form for more details.

Thank you for your support!



The peer social world of infants and toddlers during transition into early childcare

INFORMATION SHEET FOR TEACHER PARTICIPANTS (OBSERVATION)

You are invited to take part in this research. Please read this information before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to participate, thank you for considering this request.

Who am I?

My name is Peiling Ruan and I am a Masters student in Education at Victoria University of Wellington. This research project is work towards my thesis. Please also be aware that I am a permeant teacher in this studied early childcare centre.

What is the aim of the project?

This project investigates how the peer relations of infants and toddlers contribute to their social and emotional well-being or sense of belonging during transition from home to an early childcare service (ECE). Your participation will support this research by contributing to further and deepen our current understanding and insight of young children's sense of belonging and how peer socialisation might contribute successful transition into an ECE setting. In addition, it also makes a potentially useful contribution to the study of peer culture. This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee #28903.

How can you help?

You have been invited to participate because you will be involved in observation. If you agree to take part, I will observe you during work hours at ECE. I will observe you between 9 and 11 am once a week from September to November. Significant moments outside of this time will also be collected. However, private caregiving moments between you and the child such as nappy changing will be avoided. You can withdraw from the study by contacting me at any time prior data analysis on 30 November 2020. If you withdraw, the information you provided will be destroyed. The observation will not be confidential but you will be de-identified in the research outputs.

What will happen to the information you give?

This research is confidential. This means that the researcher named below will be aware of your identity but the research data will be combined and your identity will not be revealed in any reports, presentations, or public documentation. However, you should be aware that in small projects your identity might be obvious to others in your community.

Only my supervisors and I will read the notes of the observation, summaries, interview transcripts and any recordings. In this proposed thesis, video-filming will be used as the main tool to capture, record, document and depict social behaviours, norms, and culture of participants. Video-footage of children is used for coding social interactions occur in daily life and ensuring interpretation validity. Video footage of children will also be served as stimulated recall provocation for following interviews between you and me. The observation notes, summaries, interview transcripts and any recordings will be kept securely and destroyed on 30 June 2021.

What will the project produce?

The information from my research will be used in my Masters thesis, academic publications and conferences.

If you accept this invitation, what are your rights as a research participant?

You do not have to accept this invitation if you don't want to. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- withdraw from the study prior data analysis 30 November 2020;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- be able to read any reports relevant to you in this research by emailing the researcher to request a copy.

If you have any questions or problems, who can you contact?

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor:

Student:

Name: Peiling Ruan

University email address:

This content is unavailable

Supervisor:

Name: Anita Mortlock

Role: Supervisor

School: Education

Phone: This content is unavailable

University email address:

This content is unavailable

Human Ethics Committee information

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Victoria University of Wellington HEC Convenor: Associate Professor Judith Loveridge. Email hec@vuw.ac.nz or telephone +64-4-463 6028.

The peer social world of infants and toddlers during transition into early childcare

CONSENT TO OBSERVATION (teacher participant)

This consent form will be held for five years.

Researcher: Peiling Ruan, Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington.

- I have read the Information Sheet and the project has been explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.
- I agree to take part in video-recorded observation.

I understand that:

- I may withdraw from this study at any point prior data analysis on 30 November 2020, and any information that I have provided will be destroyed.
- The identifiable information I have provided will be destroyed on 30 June 2021.
- I understand that the results will be used for a Masters thesis, academic publications and presented to conferences.
- I understand that organisational consent has been provided and the organisation will not be named in any of the reports.
- My name will not be used in reports and utmost care will be taken not to disclose any information that would identify me.
- I would like to receive a copy of summary of the final report and have added Yes ☐ No ☐
my email address below.

Signature of participant: _____

Name of participant: _____

Date: _____

Contact details: _____

The peer social world of infants and toddlers during transition into early childcare

INFORMATION SHEET FOR TEACHER PARTICIPANTS (INTERVIEW)

You are invited to take part in this research. Please read this information before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to participate, thank you for considering this request.

Who am I?

My name is Peiling Ruan and I am a Masters student in Education at Victoria University of Wellington. This research project is work towards my thesis. Please also be aware that I am a permanent teacher in this studied early childcare centre.

What is the aim of the project?

This project investigates how the peer relations of infants and toddlers contribute to their social and emotional well-being or sense of belonging during transition from home to an early childcare service (ECE). Your participation will support this research by contributing to further and deepen our current understanding and insight of young children's sense of belonging and how peer socialisation might contribute successful transition into an ECE setting. In addition, it also makes a potentially useful contribution to the study of peer culture. This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee #28903.

How can you help?

You have been invited to participate because the research will be conducted at your workplace. If you agree to take part, I will interview you at a closed staff room at your centre. I will ask you questions about children's social behaviours in peer group. The interview will take 30 minutes. I will audio record the interview with your permission and write it up later. You can choose to not answer any question or stop the interview at any time, without giving a reason. You can withdraw from the study by contacting me at any time prior data analysis on 30 November 2020. If you withdraw, the information you provided will be destroyed. The interview will not be confidential but you will be de-identified in the research outputs.

What will happen to the information you give?

This research is confidential. This means that the researcher named below will be aware of your identity but the research data will be combined and your identity will not be revealed

in any reports, presentations, or public documentation. However, you should be aware that in small projects your identity might be obvious to others in your community.

Only my supervisors and I will read the notes of the observation, summaries, interview transcripts and any recordings. In this proposed thesis, video-filming will be used as the main tool to capture, record, document and depict social behaviours, norms, and culture of participants. Video-footage of children is used for coding social interactions occur in daily life and ensuring interpretation validity. Video footage of children will also be served as stimulated recall provocation for following interviews between you and me. The observation notes, summaries, interview transcripts and any recordings will be kept securely and destroyed on 30 June 2021.

What will the project produce?

The information from my research will be used in my Masters thesis, academic publications and conferences.

If you accept this invitation, what are your rights as a research participant?

You do not have to accept this invitation if you don't want to. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- choose not to answer any question;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview;
- withdraw from the study prior data analysis on 30 November 2020;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- receive a copy of your interview recording;
- receive a copy of your interview transcript;
- read over and comment on a written summary of your interview;
- be able to read any reports relevant to you in this research by emailing the researcher to request a copy.

If you have any questions or problems, who can you contact?

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor:

Student:

Name: Peiling Ruan

University email address:

This content is unavailable

Supervisor:

Name: Anita Mortlock

Role: Supervisor

School: Education

Phone: This content is unavailable

University email address:

This content is unavailable

Human Ethics Committee information

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Victoria University of Wellington HEC Convenor: Associate Professor Judith Loveridge. Email hec@vuw.ac.nz or telephone +64-4-463 6028.

The peer social world of infants and toddlers during transition into early childcare

CONSENT TO INTERVIEW

This consent form will be held for five years.

Researcher: Peiling Ruan, Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington.

- I have read the Information Sheet and the project has been explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.
- I agree to take part in an audio recorded interview.

I understand that:

- I may withdraw from this study at any point prior data analysis on 30 November 2020, and any information that I have provided will be destroyed.
- The identifiable information I have provided will be destroyed on 30 June 2021.
- I understand that the results will be used for a Masters thesis, academic publications and presented to conferences.
- I understand that organisational consent has been provided and the organisation will not be named in any of the reports.
- My name will not be used in reports and utmost care will be taken not to disclose any information that would identify me.
- I would like a copy of the recording of my interview: Yes ☐ No ☐
- I would like a copy of the transcript of my interview: Yes ☐ No ☐
- I would like a summary of my interview: Yes ☐ No ☐
- I would like to receive a copy of summary of the final report and have added my email address below. Yes ☐ No ☐

Signature of participant: _____

Name of participant: _____

Date: _____

Contact details: _____



The peer social world of infants and toddlers during transition into early childcare

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS (OBSERVATION TO CHILD PARTICIPANTS)

Your child is invited to take part in this research. Please read this information before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to participate, thank you for considering this request.

Who am I?

My name is Peiling Ruan and I am a Masters student in Education at Victoria University of Wellington. This research project is work towards my thesis. Please also be aware that I am a permanent teacher in this studied early childcare centre.

What is the aim of the project?

This project investigates how the peer relations of infants and toddlers contribute to their social and emotional well-being or sense of belonging during transition from home to an early childcare service (ECE). Your child's participation will support this research by contributing to further and deepen our current understanding and insight of young children's sense of belonging and how peer socialisation might contribute successful transition into an ECE setting. In addition, it also makes a potentially useful contribution to the study of peer culture. This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee #28903.

How can you help?

You have been invited to participate because your child will be involved in observation. If you agree your child to take part, I will observe your child during their time at ECE. I will observe your child between 9 and 11 am once a week for four weeks. Significant moments outside of this time will also be collected. However, private caregiving moments such as toileting will be avoided. You can withdraw your child from the study by contacting me at any time prior data analysis on 30 November 2020. If you withdraw, the information you provided will be destroyed. The observation will not be confidential but your child will be de-identified in the research outputs.

What will happen to the information you give?

This research is confidential. This means that the researcher named below will be aware of your child's identity but the research data will be combined and your child's identity will not be revealed in any reports, presentations, or public documentation. However, you should be aware that in small projects your child's identity might be obvious to others in your community.

Only my supervisors and I will read the notes of the observation, summaries, interview transcripts and any recordings. In this proposed thesis, video-filming will be used as the main tool to capture, record, document and depict social behaviours, norms, and culture of participants. Video-footage of children is used for coding social interactions occur in daily life and ensuring interpretation validity. Video footage of your child will also be served as stimulated recall provocation for following interviews between your child's key teacher and me. The observation notes, summaries, interview transcripts and any recordings will be kept securely and destroyed on 30 June 2021.

What will the project produce?

The information from my research will be used in my Masters thesis, academic publications and conferences.

If you accept this invitation for you child, what are your child's rights as a research participant?

You do not have to accept this invitation for you child if you don't want to. If you do decide to let your child participate, you have the right to:

- withdraw your child from the study prior data analysis on 30 November 2020;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- receive a copy of your child's socialisation profile;
- be able to read any reports relevant to your child in this research by emailing the researcher to request a copy.

If you have any questions or problems, who can you contact?

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor:

Student:

Name: Peiling Ruan

University email address:

This content is unavailable

Supervisor:

Name: Anita Mortlock

Role: Supervisor

School: Education

Phone: This content is unavailable

University email address:

This content is unavailable

Human Ethics Committee information

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Victoria University of Wellington HEC Convenor: Associate Professor Judith Loveridge. Email hec@vuw.ac.nz or telephone +64-4-463 6028.

The peer social world of infants and toddlers during transition into early childcare

CONSENT TO OBSERVATION (child participant)

This consent form will be held for five years.

Researcher: Peiling Ruan, Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington.

- I have read the Information Sheet and the project has been explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.
- I agree to my child to take part in video-recorded observation.

I understand that:

- I may withdraw my child from this study at any point prior data analysis on 30 November 2020, and any information that I have provided will be destroyed.
- The identifiable information I have provided will be destroyed on 30 June 2021.
- I understand that the results will be used for a Masters thesis, academic publications and presented to conferences.
- I understand that organisational consent has been provided and the organisation will not be named in any of the reports.
- My child's name will not be used in reports and utmost care will be taken not to disclose any information that would identify my child.
- I would like a summary of my child's peer socialisation profile: Yes ☐ No ☐
- I would like to receive a copy of summary of the final report and have added my email address below. Yes ☐ No ☐

Signature of participant: _____

Name of participant: _____

Date: _____

Contact details:

Appendix F: Observation schedule



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Observation schedule

- 1) Field observation will start at 9am and finish at 11am once a week;
- 2) Observation will pause for;
- 3) Participants will be observed during mealtimes if peers involved;
- 4) At least one permanent teaching staff will be informed before the commence and finish of each observation;
- 5) Observation will finish in the following circumstances:
 - a) participants undergo sensitive care moments such as nappy changing and sleeping; with the exception of mealtimes if peers involved;
 - b) participants stop social interactions with peer;
 - c) participants solely interact with adults, including researcher;
 - d) participants solely interact with play objects.
- 6) Observation will start in the following circumstances (see below Observation sheet):

Observation sheet					
Cues: 1. Touch peers; 2. Watch peers; 3. Eye contact with peers; 4. Respond to peers with facial expressions (e.g. smiling/crying); 5. Respond to peers with body language (e.g. move closer/away); 6. Verbally communicate with peers. 7. Cuddles with peers; 8. Play/interact with peers; 9. Touch a toy in peer's hand 10. Passing items to peers 11. Be taken items away from peers					
Child name:		Age:		Location:	
				Date:	
Cue	Time	Reciprocated social bids	Unreciprocated social bids	Rejected social bids	comment



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Interview protocol

Thank you for your consent to participation in this project. The purpose of this interview is to evaluate the settling transition of participants. You are selected to participate in this interview due to the primary caregiving relationship between you and one of the child participants. This interview will take approximately 30 minutes.

Who am I?

My name is Peiling Ruan and I am a Masters student in Education at Victoria University of Wellington. This research project is work towards my thesis.

Interview location: _____.

Interviewer: _____.

Interviewee: _____.

Part 1: Personal information

- 1) What is your highest degree?
- 2) Are you a qualified teacher in New Zealand?
- 3) Are you a registered teacher in New Zealand?
- 4) How long have you been an ECE teacher in New Zealand?
- 5) How long have you been working at this ECE centre?

Part 2: Children's transition

- 1) How would you describe the transition of ...? (child participant)
- 2) In your opinion, what are the main factors to influence the transition of ...? (child participant) For example, their culture background? Family socio-economic status? Personal characteristics? Age? Peer group?
- 3) How would you describe these social interactions (showing photos or playing videos)? In what ways, in your opinion, did this peer group enable a sense of togetherness for

the transitioning child? In what strategies, in your opinion, did the transitioning child use to affiliate with the peer group?

- 4) In terms of my interpretation, do you agree or disagree? Is there anything you want to add on or redress?
- 5) Have you noticed any other social interactions between the child and his/her peers that are not included in these visual recordings, but you would like to describe to me?

Part 3: Peer culture

- 1) What is your opinion of children's sense of groupness of this age group?
- 2) What is your opinion of children's peer culture of this age group?
- 3) In what circumstances do you think a child needs your support or intervention for his/her social interactions with other peers? For example, what gestures?

Part 4: Documentation

- 1) Is there any documentation that might be relevant to the transition of ... (child participant) that you would like to share with me? For example, learning stories?

Thank you for your time and cooperation.