

OUR STORIES: MINI CASE-STUDIES

Kaiapoi North School

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June 2021



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Table of contents

Introduction	3
How can we ensure that 5 year olds are building happy connections within our school community?	3
What Next?	4
Connecting to ELS	4
Open Days and Visits:	4
Teacher Qualities:	5
The Buddy System Revamp	6
Voices of Senior Students	6
Whole Staff Survey:	8
The New Buddy System:	9
State of Play	11
In Conclusion	12



It was the data that did it!
March 2021

Introduction

Kaiapoi North School is located in North Canterbury and has a roll of 510 students. Prior to joining the project, four-year-olds transitioning to Kaiapoi North School had between two and four preschool visits in their new classroom. Centre visits were limited and sporadic. New Entrant kaiako observed how some tamariki found the transition to school a happier experience than others and because of this wondered:

How can we ensure that 5 year olds are building happy connections within our school community?

What Kaiako did...

Kaiako began gathering data from older students, new entrant students, whānau, parents and staff. Several methods were used to build data sets:

surveys, interviews, discussion groups, observations and drawings. As kaiako looked at the data sets, they could see they needed to think carefully about how to better support tamariki with their transition to school.

Drawings by new entrant students about what made them happy when they started school revealed that familiarity with the teacher, the classroom, friends and siblings were important to children transitioning to school, along with having a parent come and stay for a time. The following quotes helped kaiako understand what was really important for tamariki.

“Mum held my hand and helped me feel brave.”

“I felt confused and then I felt happy because I saw toys to play with and new friends.”

“My friends from preschool were in my class.”

“My Mum and my sister took me to school and my sister checked on me.”



What Next?

Connecting to ELS

The data prompted kaiako to establish a regular connection with local Early Learning Services (ELS) by holding open play mornings on the first Tuesday of each month. Establishing this connection allowed more opportunities for tamariki to become familiar with future classmates, teachers, and the class and school environment. Building familiarity and positive relationships with others promoted a greater sense of belonging when transitioning to school. This aligns with the Kaiapoi North School value Te Piringa - Connect.

These visit mornings also strengthened the relationship between ELS and New Entrant kaiako. During one of the play mornings ELS kaiako commented:

“It helps bridge the gap between early childhood and the primary sector”

A shared understanding created a space between, a “borderland” as described by Dr. Sally Peters, between local Early Years Services and the New Entrant classes as opposed to a border.

Open Days and Visits:

The New Entrant kaiako, have seen the positive impact these open days and visits are having on both tamariki and their whānau.

This quote from a Year 6 student demonstrates one child’s feeling around starting school.

“At preschool there’s not much learning to do but when you get to school you feel confused because there’s so much learning to do. I was like I hope this is just like preschool because preschool is just play and sandpit and fun. You think what is this? What is maths? What is reading? What is writing? What is everything?”

(Yr 6 student)

In view of this, the New Entrant kaiako continues to hold at least four preschool visits for new tamariki where children and parents come together. Parents and ELS teachers are able to gain a better understanding of school and begin to build a relationship with us. This is evident in the following response from one ELS teacher following a school open day visit.



It was lovely to see inviting open-ended learning experiences for the children to engage in. This certainly made them feel at ease and it was similar to what they might choose to engage in at preschool. Overall, it was a lovely time for our children and parents and there has been lots of positive talk from it about starting school. From a Teacher's perspective, it is great for ECE Teachers to have the opportunity to come and see what happens in a New Entrant classroom at school. As a centre we plan to rotate our teachers for each school visit to give each teacher an opportunity to see a New Entrant classroom in practice.



“It was very hard to let go and I was worried as I didn't know the teachers” (Parent)

A point of interest from the data informed them that whānau and parents value particular qualities in a teacher, which include being welcoming, friendly, kind, supportive and patient. The following quotes are from a parent survey:

“A supportive teacher around making him feel like he belonged.”

“Teachers were accessible, friendly and very welcoming.”

“The teacher's patience and communication was really good.”

One new entrant child shared with a parent, “The teacher reminds me of you Mum”.

This feedback was certainly affirming for the kaiako and made them aware of the qualities that parents value.

The open mornings have become an integral part of the transition process, along with the four pre-school visits and the open-door policy for whānau.

Teacher Qualities

Kaiako established that whānau and parents value the time taken to communicate positively and support the children's transition. The data from parent focus groups suggests that parents sometimes feel anxious about their tamariki starting school. This reminded kaiako what an important time this is for whānau and to reflect on their role as teachers. One parent shared:

The Buddy System Revamp

Voices of Senior Students

After meeting with senior students who recalled their memories of starting school, kaiako noticed those who had a familiar person (a sibling or relation) settled more quickly.

“It was nice having them (siblings) around. I could go to them if I was upset.”

They considered the school wide buddy system that was already in place. Historically, the buddy system was timetabled fortnightly, with structured expectations where buddies were put together randomly. It was obvious that some older buddies did not enjoy the role and some classes didn't engage.

The kaiako heard the reflections of the senior students on the current buddy

system. They shared that spending time together with buddies was really important and this wasn't happening. Time to look after their buddies, to help and encourage them to do new things, was also limited. This is shared from an older student:

“Having more buddy time so they can learn how to make friend relationships so that they know how to become friends. They could go on to make their own friends. Since they've been around us, so (sic) they're not as shy anymore.” (Yr 6 student)

Further facilitated group discussion with Yr 5 and 6 students suggested that buddies may be better matched by personality and interest. This was something new to the kaiako and was very insightful. This comment was influential in planning and making





changes to the current buddy system. The Year 5 and 6 students posed a number of possibilities in the group discussion, for example:

“Put them, (buddies), with people who more suit their personality”
(Yr 5 student)

“We could see their personality, some may be the same.”
(Yr 5 student)

“How some kids could only be good at one thing, that’s another way you could pair people up.”
(Yr 6 student)

“Teachers can see in class time how they’re going together.”
(Yr 6 student)

The student voice was a significant data set. Moving forward, kaiako were influenced by these quotes to ensure buddies could form stronger

connections through their shared interests.

A response shared from one of the parents was a flag for the kaiako when she commented:

“Teaming her (child) up with a buddy like other schools would have been great”.

This indicated that whānau and parents were not always aware there was an existing buddy system. Many thoughts came to mind:

- How were kaiako going to make sense of the data to revamp the buddy system?
- Equally importantly, how were kaiako going to ensure parents and whānau were aware of the buddy system?
- Did parents know that kaiako valued the buddy system and wanted it to be an integral part of their child’s transition?

Whole Staff Survey

Kaiako needed buy-in from the teachers of senior students if this was going to work. They invited the teaching staff to share their experiences and thoughts about the current buddy time through a survey. This slide was created with the results.

Delving Deeper	
Shared a survey with staff about the rationale behind buddy time, what happens, what they would change...	
<p>What is the rationale behind buddy time?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership/Responsibility opportunities • Build positive connections • Promote Tuakana Teina • Build mana • Role models • Positive relationships/enhance friendships • Form bonds that go beyond the classroom • Nurturing skills • Sense of belonging • Positive atmosphere • Learn how to interact • Demonstrate values and beliefs 	<p>What does BT look like in your space?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hands on activities • Singing, drawing, crafts • Once a fortnight • Positive interactions and connections • Laughter • Sharing work • Busy • Games • Lunches together • Hanging out • Playing together • Supporting younger students • Siblings able to work together
<p>What is working well at buddy time?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older buddies seeking younger buddies in playground • Building connections • Talking and sharing • Asking questions • Reading and celebrating • Frequency • Tuakana Teina • Older children becoming more confident • Collaboration between teachers • Seeing siblings and sibling's friends • Going to "big kids rooms" • Singing • Children paired up well. 	<p>What would you change about BT?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some children don't know who their buddies are • Buddies often absent • Could be more authentic • So many children in one space/ one class buddied with one class • Already crowded timetable is pushed. • Seems like another thing • Huge amount of children together at the same time • Time of day • Some kids get anxious • Noisy and messy • Better if it was one class to one class rather than hub to hub./lack of space • Only one buddy not two • Teachers want more direction about the what, when and how. • More authentic if it wasn't timetabled. - weave into learning programme • Would be good to have buddies help with learning reflections • More often/longer time together

The question around 'what would you change' was the catalyst for change.

Staff concerns were raised about timetable constraints and senior students being overcommitted, for example:

“Our already crowded timetable is pushed.”

“It just seems like another thing to fit in.”

“The Year 7 and 8s have so many disruptions with sporting, cultural and arts activities.”

“Some children don't even know who their buddies are”

“It could be more authentic if it wasn't timetabled.”

“It's a huge amount of children together at the same time.”

“Some children get anxious.”

“Their crowded timetable is pushed with buddy time.”

“It would be better with one class to one class as there is a lack of space.”



The data from the whole staff survey was beginning to give the kaiako new information. It was evident that teachers were concerned about the load on the senior students in Year 7 and 8. Given this information it was decided that they would appoint Year 5 and 6 students to take on the New Entrant buddy role.

Kaiako clearly had some work to do to make the buddy system work for all stakeholders. They took time to collate and process the data and were ready to make some changes. The data and ideas were presented to a senior management meeting.

With the support of the Senior Leadership Team, the beginnings of a new buddy system were put into place.

The New Buddy System

To begin, Year 5 and 6 students were invited to apply for the role of being a New Entrant Buddy (NEB). Many students showed interest and were keen to take on this leadership role within the school. Supply outweighed demand so a selection process based

on particular criteria and class teacher recommendations was worked through.

26 students were appointed and given the responsibility of being New Entrant Buddies (NEBs) for 2021. Training sessions were held where students were asked to think about what good buddies do and how they might support 5-year-olds when problems arise. Here are some examples of their application submissions.

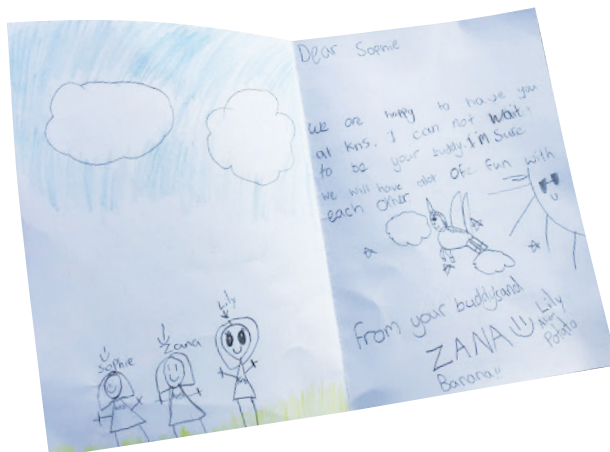
“I would like to make them feel welcome when they are shy.”

“Because they might worry and I would like to help them”

“It can be scary starting school and making new friends and I would like to help them do that.”

“Because I like little children and would like to help them adapt to the school environment.” (NEBs)

Having met the 4-year-olds at transition visits, kaiako were able to think about similar personalities and interests, then match children to older buddies with consideration and thought. The senior buddies took their role seriously, making welcome



to school cards, spending time with their buddies at pre-school visits, taking time during their own school day to pop in and see their little buddy, sharing kai with them at break times and involving their little buddies in playground activities. Many older buddies flourished and showed initiative by doing this without needing to be prompted.

The buddy system creates another opportunity for older students to develop leadership skills as well as supporting the New Entrant kaiako by providing another nurturing “go-to person” for our 5-year-olds. A parent of a New Entrant buddy reflected on the buddy system process:

“Sam is loving his new found responsibility of being a NEB. He is taking his role very seriously and sees it as being hugely important. He often tells me about his buddy and how he is going and he spent a lot of time with him across the first few weeks of the year in particular. As a parent I am loving seeing Sam in this role. He is excited to see his buddy’s daily progress in the playground in particular and feels an important part of it.” (parent of NEB)



State of Play

As the buddy project is now an integral part of the transition process, the kaiako gathered feedback on the revamped programme.

Early indications are that parents are seeing the value of the New Entrant Buddy programme, as supported in the following:

“I truly believe having an older buddy reduced a lot of anxiety that may have come up for Tyler. Tyler looks up to Khan like an idol. He says, ...but Khan will help me.”

“My child often speaks about her buddy and feels more comfortable coming to school knowing she has a buddy.”

“Tyler loved the fact that Harry has the same buddy as he does. It really helped him form a connection with a classmate.”

Kaiako also gathered reflections from the older buddies from a PMI (Plus, Minus, Interesting) framework.

“Our little buddies look up to us.”

“Little buddies are making friends with other children.”

“Our little buddies are being brave and saying hi to older children.”

“It’s good having fun together.”

“Our little buddies are happy to see us.”

They have been surprised by some of the older buddies who have shown great insight as is evident in this quote:

“We know that it can take time for little buddies to feel comfortable with us and we need to keep trying.”



In Conclusion

Teacher-researchers identified multiple data sets that indicate tamariki need familiarity with people (eg, friends from preschool, siblings, buddies), environment (eg, visits, open mornings) and things (eg, toys, photos, artefacts) when they transition to school. Building strong connections and strong bonds is an important finding and essential component of the transition to school plan at Kaiapoi North School.

Data sets have demonstrated that the senior students are committed to supporting and helping with the transition to school process to ensure a positive and happy experience. Parents have shared positive feedback about the system change.

Kaiako celebrated the time and effort the older buddies had invested this term by holding a shared hot chip lunch together! The kaiako are looking forward to the continuing success of New Entrant buddy system at Kaiapoi North School.

This project has upskilled kaiako in action-research, ensuring they take time to observe, reflect and work through an inquiry process rather than jumping straight to a solution. The value of gathering qualitative data sets has been inspirational in our growth as researchers. Kaiako appreciated being part of this process.





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