1) Transition: Theoretical Backdrop

Transition – A socially constructed meaning that changes from context to context? 

Or, Bowlby: Defences of Protest, Despair, Detachment

Transition as a Potential Loss of Assumed Connection to Self, Other and Environment bringing Defences of Protest, Despair, Detachment
2) Unsuccessful Transition as a Systemic Shift from Concentric Relation of Assumed Connection to Diametric Relation of Assumed Separation


3) A Diametric Relation of Assumed Separation between the Individual and the School System

Protest – Teacher/Student Conflict
Despair – System Level Emotional Supports
Detachment – Early School Leaving and Non-Attendance

Bronfenbrenner (1979): An Ecological Focus on Systemic Context – For Transition
4) Transition Tends to be Represented as a Problem of the Foregrounded Individual than the Background System

Masuda and Nisbett (2001) presented realistic animated scenes of fish and other underwater objects to Japanese and Americans and asked them to report what they had seen. The first statement by American participants usually referred to the focal fish (‘there was what looked like a trout swimming to the right’) whereas the first statement by Japanese participants usually referred to background elements (‘there was a lake or pond’). Japanese participants made about 70 percent more statements about background aspects of the environment. In a subsequent recognition task, Japanese performance was weakened by showing the focal fish with the wrong background, indicating that the perception of the object had been intimately linked with the field in which it had appeared. In contrast, American recognition of the object was unaffected by the wrong background.
5) Transition and Fatalism/Fear of Failure: Blanchardstown Report (Downes, Maunsell & Ivers 2006)

Nolan et al (2003) refer to the danger of ‘fatalism’ at a community level within Corduff that ‘nothing can be done’. Fear of failure is an example of fatalism at the level of the student’s experience of school (see also international research on fatalism and risk behaviour, Kalichmann et al 2000)
The responses to the question: ‘If you had a problem with your schoolwork would you tell your teachers(s) about it? Why/Why not?’

SECONDARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>MAYBE</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>122</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• While a large majority of students (approximately 75%) do feel comfortable in raising a problem with their schoolwork with their teachers, it must be acknowledged that a sizeable minority do not or are not sure if they do (more than 20%)
• It is of concern that:
  • - there is a sharp increase in 1\textsuperscript{st} year compared to 6\textsuperscript{th} class responses in those students who are \textit{not} willing or are not sure if they would tell a teacher about an academic problem – from 8\% (Primary) to more than 20\% (Secondary)
  • - there is a sharp decrease in 1\textsuperscript{st} year compared to 6\textsuperscript{th} class responses in those students who \textit{are} willing to tell a teacher about an academic problem – from approximately 91\% (Primary) to 75\% (Secondary)
  • - these differences between primary and secondary level are statistically significant ones
Sharp Increase in Students who perceive that they are not treated fairly in Secondary School compared to Primary School

• Quinlan (1998a) observed that one of the interviewed teachers in Blanchardstown referred to alienation of young people from an authoritarian educational system.
• Teacher-student relations was also a pervasive theme in Fingleton’s (2003) interviews with eleven early school leavers in the Canal Communities Area of Dublin. These interviews highlight their alienation from the school system as well as the desire of many for further paths to education though not through traditional routes.
• Forkan (2005) touches on the theme of teacher-student relations in the conclusion of his report in Blanchardstown: ‘treat all young people with respect, as this will be reciprocated’. 
• Casby’s (1997) interviews with early school leavers in Ballyfermot also noted that:
  “More attention must be paid to the process by which a young person comes to leave school early. Early school leavers attribute most significance to factors related to school: relationships with teachers, suspensions and difficulties with curricula” (p.6)
  
• US adolescents cite a sense of isolation and lack of personally meaningful relationships at school as equal contributors to academic failure and to their decisions to drop out of school (Institute for Education and Transformation 1992; Wehlage & Rutter 1986).
• Meier (1992) cites personalized, caring relationships with teachers as a prerequisite for high school-level reform
The responses to the question: ‘Are you treated fairly by teachers in school? Why/Why not?’ were as follows:

**PRIMARY: 6th Class**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>DON'T KNOW/NO ANSWER</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>YES BUT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>170</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SECONDARY: 1st Year**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>DON'T KNOW/NO ANSWER</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>YES BUT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Approximately 74% of pupils at primary level (6th class) state that they are treated fairly by teachers in school.
- Approximately 55% of students at secondary level (first year) state that they are treated fairly by teachers in school.
- Approximately 15% of pupils at primary level (6th class) state that they are not treated fairly by teachers in school.
- Approximately 25% of students at secondary level (first year) state that they are not treated fairly by teachers in school.

It is worth noting that these differences between 6th class primary and 1st year secondary are statistically significant i.e., there is a statistically significant increase in perception of being treated unfairly by teachers in secondary school compared to primary school.
Table 9. Responses to the question: ‘Are you fairly treated by teachers in school? Why/Why not?’ were as follows for the primary schools in the South West Inner City area:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>30 (93%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>25 (72%)</td>
<td>8 (20%)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>25 (78%)</td>
<td>4 (12%)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>38 (71%)</td>
<td>5 (9%)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>18 (58%)</td>
<td>7 (22%)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>23 (92%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>24 (75%)</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>183 (75%)</td>
<td>25 (10%)</td>
<td>30 (12%)</td>
<td>6 (2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As may be seen from Table 9, on average, the majority (75%) of primary school pupils responded that they are treated fairly by their teachers in school.

• Nonetheless, some 22% of pupils on average, representing more than one in every five pupils in a classroom setting report that they are not or are sometimes not treated fairly by teachers.

• Variation in responses across schools is evident with approximately one-third of the pupils in two of the seven primary schools responding in the negative to the question of being treated fairly by teachers.
Figure 4: Are you treated fairly at school?
Figure 4a: Percentage breakdown of responses to “Are you treated fairly at school?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>75%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TRANSITION POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS – A) PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHER CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS
• Continuity in afterschool clubs from primary to post-primary is another theme needing recognition.
• The Educational Disadvantage Subcommittee (2003) has recommended that School Plans address ‘key areas’ such as extracurricular programmes and connection to youth service provision within the local area as well as transition from primary to post-primary. These two elements need to be firmly connected to each other so that a plan would exist for continuity between those extracurricular activities at primary level and at secondary level.
• This point has been reiterated in the launching document ‘Quality Development of Out of School Services: An Agenda for Development’ (Downes 2006) on behalf of the QDOSS network.
TRANSITION: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR SYSTEM LEVEL SUPPORTS
- CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS OF TEACHERS
  (ESPECIALLY POSTPRIMARY)
- SYSTEM LEVEL EMOTIONAL/ThERAPEUTIC SUPPORTS
- CURRICULUM CONTINUITY
- CONTINUITY OUT OF SCHOOL SERVICES: SOCIAL SUPPORT
- CONTINUITY SPECIAL NEEDS
Continuity of Out of School Projects from Primary to Post primary level:
QDOSS recognizes that extracurricular/Out of School activities offer opportunities for responsibility and success, decision-making and social skills, protecting against early school leaving, and that it is extremely important that any such supports at primary level are sustained at secondary level.

• Are there to be strategic plans for continuity between those Out of School Services at primary level and at post primary level? Can students remain with the Out of School project as they undergo the transition from one school to another?

• Can there be continuity in Out of School Services even if the student is attending a different secondary school from that of the local one?
QDOSS notes that the disruption to the social environment of the student during transfer to post-primary is well recognized and Out of School projects offer one source of stability within the social environment during this transition process. QDOSS suggest that continuity across primary to secondary may be even more important if the student is attending a different school from his/her peers and from those he/she was with in primary school.
• 5th/6th class and first/second year post-primary need to be targeted regarding extracurricular activities with a focus on how to develop continuity within these activities from primary to post-primary. There is a need to develop bridges with local organisations and secondary schools to implement this strategy.

• The participation of 5th class pupils in extracurricular activities is extremely high, both in itself and in comparison with results from the previous study (Downes 2002). Nevertheless, the discrepancy between 5th and 6th class regarding opportunities for participation in extracurricular activities clearly needs to be remedied as part of a strategy for transition to post-primary.
Maunsell et al (2007):
* Children with general learning difficulties can often have poor organisational skills making it difficult for them to cope with the huge organisational changes in their school day at post-primary school.

* Coping with timetables, extra teachers, homework and moving around classes can be anxieties for a number of these students.
* There is a need to examine the possibility of consistently transferring some primary school practices into post-primary school for a period in first year e.g. mixed ability teaching, a small group of teachers responsible for all subject areas, arranging a ‘homebase’ for first-years, etc
* This could also extend to visits from post-primary teachers to the primary school, especially for those children with special needs. This would also provide a post-primary teacher with the opportunity to get valuable information on the individual students.

* Another recommendation is developing roles for a student liaison officer that would work for both the primary school and post-primary school in particular with this target group. This person could help prepare students in sixth class for the transition and would be a familiar person to support them once they reach post-primary school, thus adding an element of personnel continuity to the young person’s overall school experience.
Bibliography


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