

Educational Transitions

Moving Stories from Around the World

Edited by Divya Jindal-Snape



7 Moving to Secondary School

What Do Pupils in England Say About the Experience?

Maurice Galton

This chapter looks at the impact on pupils when they first arrive at secondary school. Transition¹ is often described as an anxious time but it is more true to say that pupils generally feel excitement tinged with a touch of apprehension. The following pages explore what schools are doing to make transition a more satisfactory experience and the reactions of pupils to these initiatives. The data presented here are an amalgam of three transition studies conducted in England, that of Hargreaves and Galton (2002), Galton, Gray, and Rudduck (2003), and an unpublished study carried out as part of a policy review for a local authority in England. In Hargreaves and Galton (2002), the field work in six transition schools was carried out in 1996–1997, while Galton et al. (2003) involved some 20 schools situated mainly in 5 Local Authorities in the Midlands and East Anglia covering the period 2000–2002. The review for the Local Authority took place in 2005–2006 and involved three schools. In all cases, groups of pupils were interviewed during the last term at primary school² shortly after induction day, again at half-term following the move to secondary school and finally at the end of the year following transition. Throughout the chapter various suggestions are made concerning ways in which the transition process might be improved.

CHANGES IN TRANSITION PROCEDURES OVER TIME IN ENGLAND

Hargreaves and Galton's (2002) study attempted to replicate the original research carried out during the ORACLE (Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation) project (Galton, Simon, & Croll, 1980; Galton & Willcocks, 1983) two decades earlier. This showed that a number of significant changes had taken place with regard to the administration of the transition process and that schools had moved to eliminate some of the immediate anxieties which earlier studies of transition had highlighted. Some of these changes were less the result of fresh thinking about transition and had more to do with the changed circumstances of schools, particularly the decline in the power of the Local Education Authorities and the

'market forces' approach to education with its emphasis on parental choice, which had been the flagship of the Conservative administration (Tomlinson, 2005). Thus in the late 1970s when the first ORACLE transition study was carried out the choice of secondary school was wholly, or in the case of voluntary aided schools, partially determined by the Local Authority, who allocated most pupils to the school catchment area in which they resided. In these circumstances, therefore, secondary schools gave little thought as to how to accommodate parents' and pupil's wishes so that a 'take it or leave it' attitude tended to dominate. Thus in most cases in the original 1975/80 ORACLE study children visited the school for one morning only as part of a transition program. There they were addressed by the coordinator/tutor responsible for transition, given a conducted tour of the school and then sent back to their primary feeder schools before lunch. The Year 7 coordinator might perhaps also pay a follow-up visit to the main primary feeder schools following the tour of the transition school. A Parents' Evening would also be arranged towards the end of the Summer Term prior to transition. Its main purpose would be to instruct the audience on the rules of the school and the clothing policy, particularly the required items for PE and various sports (Delamont & Galton, 1986; Galton & Willcocks, 1983).

By the 1990s, however, things had changed. Most schools now had Liaison Committees where the administrative issues of transition were considered. Unlike the 1970s these arrangements were less hierarchical in that the chairperson tended to rotate between the primary and secondary head teachers. Matters like the transition of children's records, the provision available for children with special needs, the sharing of curriculum issues now often featured on the agenda. In an effort to gain as many new pupils as possible, most transition schools now organized several Parents' Meetings one year prior to transition in the following mid-September. This involved opportunities to visit classrooms and see pupils (brought in especially for the evening) engaged in various curriculum activities. In some cases the transition school's facilities were available for use by the primary schools, particularly science laboratories, drama studios, and ICT suites. As suggested earlier, the reasons behind these moves often appeared to have less to do with the actual transition process and were more concerned to encourage pupils' parents and pupils to choose the particular school so that its numbers could be boosted and its finances increased. Hence these contacts were also supplemented by regular newsletters and other documents, designed to inform potential clients of the advantages of bringing their child to the particular institution.

INDUCTION DAYS

One major change, however, has been in the treatment of pupils prior to transition. Now almost every Local Authority organizes a special day toward

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the end of the summer term when all children whose parents had opted to send them to a particular school spend a whole Induction Day on the premises. In most schools the Induction Day follows a similar pattern. Pupils are initially divided into their tutor and form groups and spend some time getting to know each other through a series of ice-breaker activities. There will be an assembly at which the school Principal welcomes the new pupils followed by a conducted tour of the school. Whereas the tour in the 1970s was often superficial with a volunteer pupil briefly stopping outside a room to say, "This is where you do French," or "This is where you queue for snacks," these latter tours are generally conducted by the form tutors with frequent stops to allow question and answer sessions. In most schools the tour is followed by an early lunch to avoid the queues when the main body of pupils finish morning sessions. In between and during the afternoon there will be various lessons, a mix of core and other subjects. These lessons are generally made as exciting as possible so that for example in Science there will be plenty of explosions and lots of smoke accompanied by strange smells. The final session usually consists of questions and answers about any remaining issues that the pupils might have. Sometimes these are conducted by the Year 7 Coordinator but more often space is allowed for the visiting primary intake to question existing Year 7 pupils. At some point during the day there will be an early introduction into the school routines and rules, generally during a tutor meeting (Hargreaves & Galton, 2002).

Interviews with the pupils (Hargreaves & Galton, 2002) found that the response to these activities was generally positive. Pupils found that their immediate anxieties were dealt with. These usually consisted of whether they would make new friends and get on with pupils from other primary schools, getting to see what the new teachers were like, and working out practical arrangements such as how one paid for lunch, what one did in break time, and where to put one's bag. The conclusion of the Oracle Replication Transition Study was that, in respect of these activities designed to improve social adjustment, little more could be done. Indeed, to do more would be perhaps to tip the scales too far away from the direction of maintaining some degree of discontinuity; in this case slight apprehension on the parts of the pupils so that they would continue during the summer vacation to see the move to the new school as a significant change in their status.

Pupils, however, expressed reservations about the content of these induction days. In the 2005–2006 study pupils complained that many of the 'taster' sessions were too short so that it was impossible to finish off the picture in art or the experiment in science. They found that the guided tour of the school often served to confuse them more because they were not provided with a map and therefore had no understanding of their whereabouts (relative to their form room) or the permissible traffic routes. One group of pupils suggested that it would make a good exercise to provide a map and send them off in groups on a 'treasure hunt' to identify various parts of the school because:

Not only would we get to work it out for ourselves but we would have more time to get to know others in our form and make new friends.

Having sufficient time to meet in tutor groups and make new friends was deemed to be the most important part of the day. Next to this was the opportunity to meet with the present Year 7 away from the teacher's close supervision,

So we could get to know what it was really like.

In one school the dining room was sited on the edge of the area where pupils congregated during break times. Pupils complained that at lunch time it felt like being in a zoo because when the main school arrived they crowded around the windows, making faces while they watched them eat. While appreciating the chance to take an early lunch in order to work out the menu choices and payment methods most pupils felt the process was too rushed.

A bigger problem involved the organization of the day itself. Because teachers who take part (as form tutors, providing lessons, etc.) have other teaching commitments throughout the day it is inevitable that timings will slip because classes sometimes over-run. This resulted in pupils having to stand around waiting to be collected. Often they were told to remain silent while waiting and when talking began teachers would attempt to re-impose control, often by shouting so that they were seen by many pupils as 'stressy' because,

They shout and get mad when someone speaks when they're speaking and take it out on the rest of us.

It was also often the case that in arranging these activities the Year 7 coordinator required pupils to return to some familiar central point, such as the Assembly Hall, so that the new teacher could collect his/her charges from the **previous one**. Sometimes this led to **pupils returning from a teaching block only to then set out for another classroom in the same location with the new teacher**. One solution is to use **older pupils to act as guides** and mentors throughout the day, thereby allowing the newcomers to be moved directly to their next location to await the teacher's arrival.

IMMEDIATE POST-TRANSITION IMPRESSIONS

For the majority of pupils the immediate anxieties associated with transition appear relatively short lived. There is remarkable agreement on this point when studies spanning four decades are compared. Youngman (1978) and Youngman and Lunzer (1977) found only 20% of pupils in England retained negative feelings after one term in the transition school, a

conclusion supported by Spelman (1979) in Northern Ireland and by Dutch and McCall (1974) in Scotland. More recently, Evangelou et al. (2008) have reported that 75% of pupils said they had adjusted well by the end of their first term in the transition school. Among the pupils who failed to adjust within a short period, between 6 and 10% have reported persistent problems (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; ILEA, 1986). Galton and Willcocks (1983) found that with only about 12% of pupils were the dips in attainment sustained and relatively serious (i.e., >2 standard deviations).

A recent search of the literature³ found 24 UK studies in which pupils' pre- and post-transition concerns were identified covering the four decades since 1968. Most of these concerns could be classified under six distinct headings:

- i. Personal adaptability: Mainly concerns about being the youngest and smallest and about fitting in with older pupils;
- ii. Work: Coping with different subjects and doing homework on time;
- iii. Size: Getting lost, not using the authorized routes, etc.;
- iv. Teachers: Adjusting to several teachers (particularly how strict they were);
- v. Friendships: Making new friends and keeping old ones; and
- vi. Moving: Getting to school on time, learning the rules, bringing the right books and equipment, buying school dinners, getting a locker.

In Figures 7.1 the relative frequencies of these various concerns are portrayed prior to transition. The most frequent concerns are related to making new friends and retaining old ones from the primary school. This emphasis is reflected in the earlier comments on induction days. The second most commonly expressed concern relates to the size of the secondary school and of getting lost. Concerns about harder work and coping with homework, the next highest category, are balanced by looking forward to having better

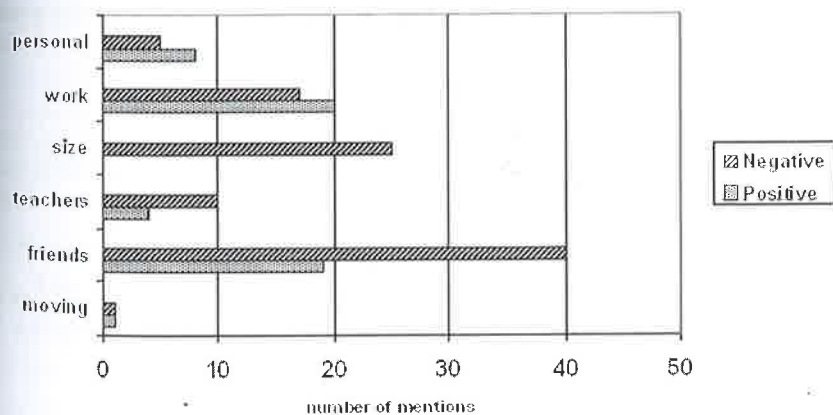


Figure 7.1 Pre-transfer concerns.

facilities such as laboratories for science, a proper drama studio and a dedicated gymnasium for PE.

In Figure 7.2 the post-transition perceptions are displayed. Issues relating to the move are now the most frequently mentioned aspect of the transition but these references are mostly positive. Pupils have learned to find the way around the various buildings, are coping with the school dinner queue, the vagaries of the timetable and getting themselves to school on time. On the negative side, peer relationships and issues to do with work still get most mentions but this is now closely followed by concerns about various teachers, particularly the way that they apply school rules, including the tendency of some teachers to punish the whole class for an individual's misdemeanor. The following are taken from the 2005–2006 study.

Good teachers explain things and don't accuse you of not listening, can have a laugh, listen to your reasons when you're late and don't pick on the whole class when just one or two are fooling about.

It's weird sometimes because if another teacher comes into the class they act a lot different to when the other teacher isn't there. They're really jolly and nice but when the other teacher goes out they're back to shut up and shouting like normal.

Supply (or cover) teachers appear to present particular difficulties:

Sometimes they can't control the class so they get another teacher. I think they kind of exaggerate the story so the teacher thinks we've been worse than we have. That way they don't look so hopeless but we get told off more for it.

Basically, the substitute doesn't teach. Most of the work set is written, out of books. Like they tell us to do a page and write out the questions and answer them. That's when people start misbehaving because they're bored.

Not having sufficient friends remains a particular cause of concern, not least because there is security in numbers and a person with friends is less likely to be bullied. Break times, particularly lunch were a constant worry for the 2005–2006 sample.

The older years act as if you're really tiny. They push your sandwich in your mouth. In the lunch queue I stood by my cousin who's Year 9 and these two girls were mouthing off at me.

When you're in the dinner line they push you out of the way. It's like we're ghosts, they ignore us and act as if we're not there.

On work related issues the emphasis tends to have shifted since before transition. There are now fewer concerns about coping and more expressions of disappointment about the repetitive nature of activities which were already covered at primary school and on the emphasis on writing in subjects such as science and mathematics. Foreign Language lessons also involve lots of copying and are disliked mainly for that reason.

It's [maths] the same here [as at primary school] but more complex. . . . We just do bigger numbers.

We write more in maths than we do in English. She writes on the board and then says, "Here you go. Open your books and do questions 1, 2 and 3" so we just write.

We hardly do any practical. If we do it, doesn't last long and we have to write it up from the board.

We couldn't understand our teacher's French. Then we had a supply and we couldn't understand her English. So we just copy from the book.

For these reasons it is the subjects where there is less writing and more active participation which receive greater acclaim. Art gets most positive mentions with Physical Education next followed by Humanities.

I used to hate art in primary but here it's unbelievable. You've got so much information, lots of equipment and so much you can do.

I like the athletics, sprinting, hurdles and things. I now go to a real gym on Friday nights and go on treadmills and stuff.

History is fun. We make things like a modern roundhouse out of straw and I've tried it at home.

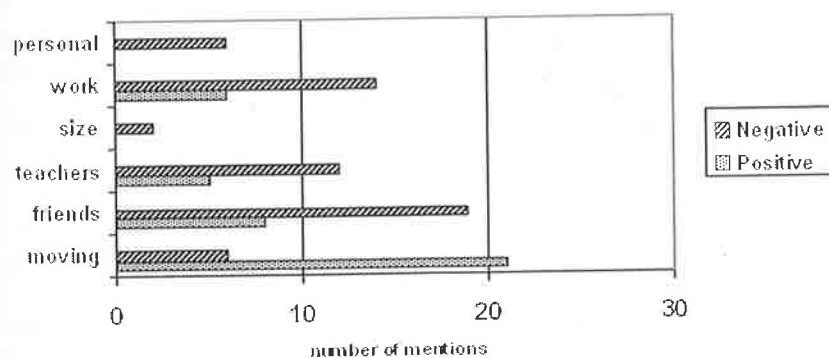


Figure 7.2 Post-transfer concerns.

In the final interviews, which took place one year after transition, pupils are already looking forward to moving to the second year of secondary school in the hope that some of these concerns about teachers, work and bullying will no longer apply or if they do to a lesser degree.

In Year 8 the teachers will trust you more and we'll hopefully get fewer supply teachers.

We will mix up classes so I can make a fresh start with new teachers and avoid some of the teachers I didn't get on with this past year.

We will get to use computers more.

We will not be the youngest so won't be picked upon so often.

And, finally reflecting on their Year 7 experience pupils offered the following advice to their Year 6 peers who would be joining the school after the summer holiday:

Don't cry in front of people or they'll take the mick.

Keep yourself to yourself.

Don't go around telling kids you don't like to shut up.

Don't say personal stuff out in class or you'll get laughed at. Don't give cheek to older pupils or they'll have a go at you.

However, there were also some positive words of encouragement:

Don't worry. All big people won't bully you. Come here and settle in—it's just like your old school but bigger so don't be scared.

Respect the teacher, respect your friends and you'll be proud of yourself. Respect, like react to people how you want them to react to you.

BRIDGING UNITS AS AN AID TO CURRICULUM CONTINUITY

A continuing problem with regard to transition has been the failure of many secondary schools to take account of what has been taught in primary school. The so-called 'fresh start' approach is epitomized in Galton and Willcocks (1983, p. 114) where the art master told the new pupils that "instead of a bit of splash and fun we are really going to think about drawing . . . about the basic elements of design; color, shape and form."

In Galton, Gray and Rudduck (1999) many of the science teachers interviewed had never examined a primary school science syllabus and were therefore unaware that some of the topics they intended to teach Year 7 had been covered during the primary years. As discussed earlier in the chapter, pupils enter the secondary school looking forward to more difficult work tempered with concerns about their ability to cope. When they find that much of the Year 7 work replicates that of Year 6 they easily become disillusioned and their attitudes toward these subjects dip (Galton et al., 2003).

One particular strategy for overcoming this problem has been to develop what have become known as "Bridging Units." These consisted of a series of exercises, mainly in English, mathematics, and science, which pupils start in the last few weeks of their primary school. The books containing the pupils' work then move with them to the secondary school where further exercises, building on the earlier work, are continued during the first month in Year 7. Besides ensuring a degree of continuity the associated aim of these bridging units is to enable teachers to gain insights to the capabilities of their new pupils and to use this knowledge in their planning of activities once the units are completed.

However, the first of these units, developed by the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA, 2002) in English and mathematics met with partial success. Galton et al. (2003) found that these units were received with mixed feelings by both primary and secondary teachers. Teachers at primary level said that the need to devote each morning to literacy and numeracy activities in the period up to the national tests meant that the rest of the curriculum was squeezed so that children missed out on subjects like art, drama, and physical education. There was also little time available for extended investigation. Primary teachers therefore tended to use the time after the National Tests to do more imaginative and creative activities. Consequently, there was a certain degree of resentment at having to devote more time to the core subjects, particularly since some of the topics chosen by the QCA had been "done to death" during Year 6 as part of the National Curriculum. Where primary teachers did do the units, therefore, they tended not to follow their logical order but to pick and choose from various sections which they thought would be more interesting to the pupils. This made a mockery of the idea of continuity.

For the secondary teachers there were also problems. To begin with, not all transition schools had distinct catchment areas; some took pupils from up to 15 primary feeder schools. While in this situation, the main proportion of pupils might come from three or four schools others might contribute as few as half a dozen pupils. Liaison with these latter primary schools would be poor so that pupils might arrive for the first term after the move to secondary school having not done any of the bridging units. This presented problems to the teachers who then had to have some pupils doing extra work that others had already done in the main feeder schools.

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Moreover there appeared to be uncertainties among teachers as to the purpose of the units. Many teachers saw them as yet another element in the process of social adjustment by giving pupils work with which they would have been familiar from primary school, thus providing an easy introduction into academic life in the secondary school. Where this view prevailed certain consequences followed. First, secondary teachers spent less effort reviewing the work done before transition, since they did not see the curriculum continuity issue as of vital importance. This in turn produced indifference on the part of the pupils who thought that the teachers were not interested in the work and therefore did not take the tasks set at secondary level seriously. More importantly, because teachers did not see the purpose was to promote curriculum continuity they tended to see the units as a finite piece of work and therefore did not associate what was undertaken with what was to follow subsequently. As one pupil interviewed by Galton et al. (2003) responded in relation to a locally-produced Science bridging unit on the life cycle of the moth:

Once we'd finished it the teacher put on his white coat and we did the Bunsen burner.

Nevertheless, there have been more favorable reports of the use of bridging units, particularly when they are jointly constructed within a pyramid and take account of local factors (Suffolk, 2001). This approach has several advantages compared to the weaknesses of the QCA units. First, such units are more likely to provide a meaningful context so that the pupils can study recognizable topics with which they are familiar and which hopefully are of interest to them. Investigating the canals in a Midland town, the characteristics of a coastal region in a school on the Norfolk/Suffolk border, solving a murder mystery entitled 'Who killed the Chef?' based on a famous city hotel which had been the subject of a TV program are all such examples. In the latter case pupils in the primary school used microscopes to identify materials found at the murder scene in order to deduce from the evidence the most likely guilty person. On coming to the secondary school they were introduced to further ideas about chromatography and on then re-testing various samples were able to arrive at a new suspect. This is the kind of unit recommended by both Davis and McMahon (2004) and Braund and Driver (2005). According to these latter authors 'too many introductory topics in Year 7 still begin with training in basic laboratory skills' and fail to recognize the previous levels of competence and experience gained at primary school as one Year 7 pupil explained:

You are always experimenting, testing and investigating about the same things [as in primary school] only in secondary school you just have better equipment. (Braund & Driver, 2005, p. 88)

These authors therefore argue that a crucial factor in designing effective bridging units is to ensure that the levels of practical skills and the concepts used are an advance of what was done at primary school thus building in an element of discontinuity but also of progression as in the 'Who killed the Chef?' unit described previously. In their own work based on these ideas they report around 87% pupil satisfaction. It is also noticeable that in the best examples schools have tended to use an integrated approach which combines some work in Science with different forms of writing and some mathematics calculations. This has the advantage that pupils do not have to do too many units thus making them feel that they are still doing primary school work. This approach only appears to work however, if there is active cooperation between the various departments within the secondary school and it is not just part of an induction program mainly handled through the Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) program. Braund (2007) offers a more ambitious alternative in seeking to identify common topics taught in the final 2 years in primary school and the first 2 years after transition so that teachers at each level can make explicit links both forwards and backwards in terms of the concepts taught and the experimental techniques used. Built into these teaching units are pupil self-assessment activities designed to ensure smoother progression.

Bridging units work best therefore when there are clearly defined local pyramids so that most of the teachers in the feeder and transition schools can play a part in their production. An added advantage of developing locally based units is that the discussions will involve not only the curriculum content but also the pedagogy to be used in order to deliver the materials.

SHARING PEDAGOGY ACROSS TRANSITION

More recently, schools have also attempted to become more aware of each other's teaching approaches. In the 1970s there were the occasional attempts by secondary teachers to visit primary schools and to observe lessons. By the new millennium these visits had become something of a regular occurrence and, moreover, some of these exchanges were two-way so that primary teachers were also able to come and see what was taking place in Year 7 classes. These reciprocal visits have been well received by teachers who during interview often spoke of the interesting things that were going on in the primary school compared to the rather restricted approaches used at Year 7 and Year 8.

However, the research based on observation seems to challenge these claims. In Figure 7.3 the overall teacher pupil interactions recorded during the Oracle Replication (Hargreaves & Galton, 2002) are shown. In the Oracle approach interactions are divided into different types of questions, different types of statements, silent interactions (mainly when teachers are listening to pupils report or explain or read), and periods where there are

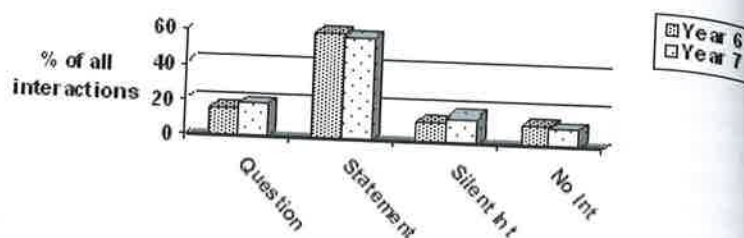


Figure 7.3 Percentage of interactions; pre- and post- transfer.

no interactions because teachers are housekeeping (giving out books) or monitoring what is happening. As Figure 7.3 shows, the patterns are almost identical in both the Year 6 and the Year 7 classes. Classroom talk is dominated by teachers making statements.

Figure 7.4 shows a breakdown of class questions. In the Oracle observation schedule these can be either to do with seeking facts, obtaining a single answer (closed), or more challenging in that they allow for possible alternative answers (open). These latter so-called challenging questions were a central feature in New Labour's (ruling party in the UK at that time) push for 'interactive whole class teaching.' At both primary and secondary level the proportions of the different type of questions are approximately the same with open questions constituting the smallest percentage overall at around 5% of the total number.

In Figure 7.5, where the proportions of statements used are analyzed, there are some minor variations (in the order of 5%) between Year 6 and Year 7. Secondary teachers make more factual statements and give more directions overall while primary teachers appear to be concerned more often with routine. This is fairly easily explained in terms of the classroom situation where a primary teacher will have what has been called 'periods of evaporated time' when the class or a group of children in a class switch from one curriculum area to another. These switches often require pupils to change places or move in and out of groups and teachers to collect in old and hand out new books or to return homework. In relation to making statements of ideas, again associated with problem-solving, exploration, and higher order thinking, Year 6 and Year 7 classes show both the lowest

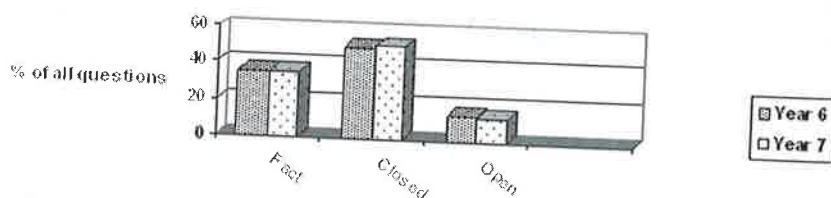


Figure 7.4 Percentage of questions before and after transfer.

percentage and also equal amounts of activity. Overall, therefore, despite the claims of teachers who visit each other's classroom that there are major differences in the ways that pupils are taught, the patterns of interaction suggest that the classroom pedagogy in both Year 6 and Year 7 classes is remarkably similar and that the main differences concern seating arrangements (in groups at primary; rows or pairs in secondary).

How then to account for the fact that the perceptions of teachers differ from this research evidence? Two factors provide possible explanations. The first of these concerns the timing of these exchange visits. Typically, when teachers were questioned about timing they said that the visits took place in June and July. This was because it was convenient for the secondary teachers since they had more free time, having 'got rid of Year 11 classes,' while the primary teachers were concerned that the visits should not take place until after they 'had finished with the SATS (Standard Assessment Tasks).' But, as has been seen in the account of the use of bridging units, the period after the National Curriculum tests is just the time when teachers in primary schools are likely to engage in more creative problem-solving activities. Thus what the secondary teachers see on these visits is not typical of what takes place during the rest of the year when as other studies have shown, there is a considerable amount of coaching and direct instruction (Alexander, 2000; Smith, Hardman, Wall, & Mroz, 2004).

A second factor which may explain the discrepancy is that the visits of teachers tend to be largely unstructured. It may be, for example, that when the teachers see pupils in the primary school sitting in groups, they make the assumption that they are cooperating whereas the research evidence (Kutnick, Blatchford, & Baines, 2002) suggests that often this may not be the case. Indeed more recent studies have suggested that there has been a reversal in trends in primary schools toward even more direct teaching. Commenting on a series of studies stretching from 1976 to 2005, Galton (2007) has shown that the patterns of interaction (questions and statements) have been remarkably stable or had regressed. In another study by Webb and Vulliamy (2006), 18 out of the 45 primary classrooms visited now had desks or tables arranged in rows. The shift to whole-class pedagogy therefore seems to have promoted a dominance of teaching as transmission. A similar conclusion was reached by Smith et al. (2004) whose analysis suggests that questioning was now conducted at a rapid pace using predictable

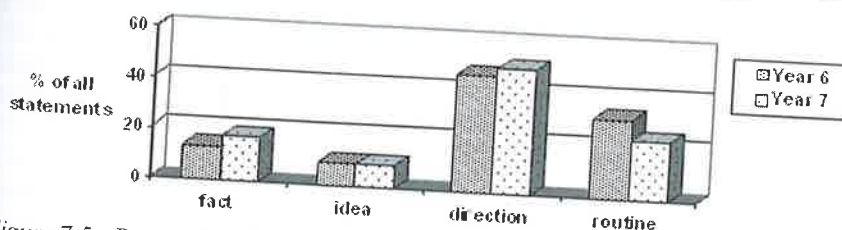


Figure 7.5 Percentage of statements before and after transfer.

sequences of teacher-led recitation and that much of the teaching in the primary classroom was interrogative and directive in nature.

Thus the wheel appears to have come full circle in that the changes mandated by governments have promoted a high degree of continuity in the pedagogy used by teachers in the final year of primary and first year of secondary school. However, whereas the starting point of those concerned in the 1970s was to make secondary teaching more like primary teaching (albeit as we have seen primary teaching was not as exciting as was often claimed) legislators have now succeeded in making primary teaching much more like typical secondary teaching with the consequences that the dips in attainment, attitude and motivation continue because pupils expect things to be more interesting and varied, when they move to the secondary school and quickly find out, that very little has changed.

RECENT TRANSITION INITIATIVES

Table 7.1 summarizes the main changes observed during the last 30 years using what has become known as the *five bridges of transition*. It can be seen that in the administrative sphere there is greater use of computers for data transition and packages such as SIMS are now more widely available. In the social awareness area there is increasing use of e-mail and the Internet to link primary and secondary pupils so that before transition it is possible for those in primary school to quiz their peers in the secondary school concerning their anxieties. Some schools organize pupil exchanges so that when the Year 7 coordinators go to a primary school they take Year 7 pupils with them to answer the Year 6 pupils' questions. Some schools have adopted a buddying system whereby on arrival at the secondary school the new Year 7 pupil is allocated a particular individual who will help and support him during the year. More often these buddies are taken from Year 9 whereas, since one of the main complaints of Year 7 pupils is that they resent reverting after transition to the most junior status, the use of the current Year 7 in relation to the Year 6 intake would at least give them a certain degree of responsibility for which they appear to yearn. If this arrangement was developed then the buddying system could go right through the school so that new Year 7 pupils retained their buddy in Year 8 and Year 9.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, the biggest change has been in the use of bridging units as a means of improving curriculum continuity although there is little evidence that the official recognized units that replaced those of the QCA's as part of the Key Stage 3 strategy have been taken up by a large number of schools. Instead, as described earlier, the preference seems to be for schools to develop their own units.

The evidence would suggest that much of the transition school's efforts are still concentrated on overcoming the short-term concerns of pupils. Pre- and post-induction sessions, the use of 'bridging units' where work started

Table 7.1 The 5 Transition Bridges (1997—present)

Transition bridges	Practice in 1977	Practice in 1997	Practice now
1. Administrative (designed to smooth the process of transition)	<i>Occasional meetings of headteachers. Transition of pupil records, pre-transition tests.</i>	<i>Headteachers meet regularly. Fewer records exchanged. Visits to Y6 classes by Y7 coordinator & Senco.</i>	<i>As in 1997 but with computerized data transition. Some subject specialists now also visit primary feeders.</i>
2. Social/User Friendly (measures to ease pupil's anxieties)	<i>Brief visit to transition school followed by parent evening.</i>	<i>Summer induction days. Several parents' evenings. Use of transition school facilities (ICT, PE, drama).</i>	<i>As in 1997 but more pupil exchanges, buddy schemes, e-mail exchange. More reliance on pupil voice.</i>
3. Curriculum (seeking to maintain continuity and progression)	<i>No activity</i>	<i>Bridging Units (QCA) Summer School (Gifted in art/drama; less able in maths and literacy).</i>	<i>More use of locally constructed bridging units, fewer summer schools. Using Y7 as a motivating year (more active curriculum, etc.).</i>
4. Teaching & Learning	<i>No activity</i>	<i>Little activity</i>	<i>More 2-way teacher exchanges involving peer observation sometimes structured.</i>
5. Managing Learning (helping pupils become 'professional learners')	<i>No activity</i>	<i>Little activity</i>	<i>Some post-induction programs but mostly excluding core subjects.</i>

in the primary school carries on during the first three weeks after transition, are all designed to provide improved continuity during the settling-in period rather than promote a series of graduated changes to the pupils' circumstances which are in accord with stage-environment fit theory. The need for schools to think longer term in relation to transition is supported by work in other disciplines. For example, in the field of occupational psychology Nicholson (1987) has proposed that work-role transitions consist of four phases. Phase 1, described as *preparation*, parallels the kinds of program most secondary schools now offer with induction days, visits of the Year 7 tutor to the primary feeder schools, and parents' evenings. This

might be extended, as some schools are doing, by increasing the number of induction days to include more experience of typical teaching and by extending the buddy system whereby Year 7 pupils exchange information with their Year 6 peers on a regular basis using electronic forms of communication.

Nicholson's Phase 2 consists of initial *encounters* and would correspond to a post-induction program which would extend beyond the existing use of activities, such as bridging units, aimed at improved continuity, and include various activities that build on the idea of '*learning to be a professional pupil*' (Lahelma & Gordon, 1997). Only a few schools in England appear to have developed such programs which include the development of study and thinking skills designed to support independent working, together with the introduction of more cooperative forms of learning and familiarization and sensitivity exercises which build on the experiences of earlier schooling. Galton et al. (2003) however found that even where these programs existed they tended to be undertaken in PSHE time and as a result the skills learned were not applied in subjects such as mathematics and science where attitudes and motivation are poorest.

Nicholson's final two phases consist of *adjustment* and *stabilisation*, respectively. At the adjustment phase normal working conditions pertain but there is frequent and immediate feedback provided on both success and failure. While teachers will provide feedback it tends to be *corrective* by pointing out errors, demonstrating the correct procedures, etc. rather than *informing* whereby pupils' reasoning is explored and strategies for identifying and correcting mistakes identified (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Neither is the overall picture of the pupil's progress coordinated other than at parents' evenings and in end-of-term reports. For Nicholson, stabilisation involves future goal setting and appraisal of what is termed 'role evolution.' This should concentrate on addressing those aspects of the pupil's adjustment (whether social, personal, or academic) where improvement is required and setting future goals for the following year. Thus attention to the issues surrounding adjustment at transition needs to extend beyond the present relatively short periods of concern. This would be in accord with the findings of West, Sweeting, and Young (2008) who collected pupils' retrospective views of the transition experience and found that higher levels of concern at transition were positively correlated with various measures of wellbeing such as depression and self esteem at two later age points (13 and 15). This is likely to have come about because pupils who have concerns at transition about making friends, getting on with teachers and so on are likely to experience similar difficulties in the following years.

In deriving and sustaining such transition initiatives it seems clear that schools need to pay more attention to the voices of their pupils. They are the ones who have first-hand knowledge of what it is like to make the transition from primary to secondary school, as many of their comments

demonstrate. They are thus in the best position to offer relevant and useful suggestions in helping to reduce some of the tensions associated with the move to the new school.

NOTES

1. In the UK transition is often also referred to as transfer.
2. In England the last year in the primary school is Year 6 so the first year at secondary school is Year 7. Most transitions take place at this stage when pupils are aged between 10–11 years.
3. I am grateful for the help of my colleague, Ms. Jenny Symonds, who has carried out an extensive review of transition studies on which the two figures are based.

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