

**University of East London  
Professional Doctorate in Applied Educational and Child  
Psychology**

**An Exploration of the Primary to Secondary  
School Transition in an Irish Context.**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the  
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Applied Educational and Child Psychology**

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## **Declaration**

This work has not previously been accepted for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted for any degree.

This research is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Doctorate in Applied Educational and Child Psychology.

This dissertation is the result of my own work and investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references in the text. A full reference list is appended.

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## **Abstract**

Each year in Ireland, over 50,000 young people make the transition from primary to secondary school. This journey, although regarded with importance, has not been researched to any great degree in the Irish context. International research has tended to be mainly quantitative in its focus. Relatively little attention, in transition related research, has been paid to the 'voice' of the young people or the teachers who strive to support them along the way.

This research, through a three phase mixed methods research design, explored the transition experiences of a group of young people who had made the transition from 13 small primary schools into a single large secondary school, in a rural setting in Ireland. The views of some of their primary school and secondary school teachers were also gathered. The overall aim of the research was to establish a rich picture of the lived reality of the primary to secondary school transition process. In order to achieve this, Phase 1, by means of a comparison of a pre and post transition standardised questionnaire measure, sought to investigate the effects of the transition on each young person's self-esteem. Phase 2, through the use of a transition questionnaire with all of the young people, sought to investigate the experiences of all of the young people. It then focused more specifically, through the use of a semi-structured interview, on some who had been identified as experiencing either a decline or an increase in their self-esteem levels. Phase 3, through the use of semi-structured interviews with primary school teachers and focus groups with secondary school teachers, investigated what they had to say about the transition process they observe and experience each year.

Building on the reported findings of what the young people and their teachers had to say, this research provides a number of recommendations. The unique contribution of this research is that it offers the "Transition Corridor" as a framework for action for the future.

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## List of Abbreviations Used

EP	Educational Psychologist
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
MoS	Model of Service
SEN	Special Education Need
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Association
S-WPBS	School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support
CoS	Continuum of Support
WHO	World Health Organisation
PSI	Psychological Society of Ireland
UEL	University of East London
EFPA	European Federation of Psychologists' Associations
SDQ-11	Self Description Questionnaire-11
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TA	Thematic Analysis
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1: Overview of this Chapter

An aspect of schooling that has been prominent in educational research is that of school transitions (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Alspaugh, 1998; Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford, 1983) with the transition from primary to secondary school regarded as one of the most difficult in pupils' educational careers (Zeedyk, Gallaher, Henderson, Hope, Husband & Lindsay, 2003). This research was conceived and carried out with a view to exploring the lived reality of the primary to secondary school transition process that some young people and their teachers experience in an Irish context. This was regarded as important as each year 50,000 young people make the transition from primary to secondary school in Ireland (Naughton, 2003). However, despite the large numbers of young people who make the transition, it is surprising that little research has taken place into the primary to secondary school transition process in Ireland (Naughton, 2003). Naughton speculates that the alienation of many young people from their schooling may be traced to this period.

This introductory chapter will set the scene of this research in terms of providing a background to and a context for this research (1.1). The focus of the research will be examined (1.2) and this will be followed by an explanation of the rationale for this research (1.3). Added to this, the aims of the research will be outlined (1.4), and the relevance of this research to the professional role of the researcher examined (1.5). The interesting geographical context of this research will be briefly addressed (1.6) as will an explanation of the original and distinctive contribution this research makes to the practice of Educational Psychology (1.7). Finally, a summary of this chapter will be provided followed by a brief outline of the overall structure of this thesis (1.8).

## 1.2: Focus of the Research

The transition from primary to secondary education is seen as one of the most difficult in pupils' educational careers (Zeedyk, Gallaher, Henderson, Hope, Husband & Lindsay, 2003). The way in which a young person responds to this stressful period can have long-term effects. Stradling and MacNeil (2000) concluded that young people can respond to the primary to secondary school transition in any one of four ways. Some young people can respond positively and proactively to the new demands and challenges, whereas others may adopt a more reactive coping strategy (a low profile) and seek to learn indirectly from the experiences of others. Some may feel they have no control over the situation and attribute this to some failing in themselves and some may conclude from their early experiences that they will never meet the new school's requirements and expectations and opt instead for acceptance by the group which represents the school's counter culture.

An analysis of the four possible response behaviours highlights the difficulties that many young people can face during the transition from primary to secondary school. It is evident that some young people may respond positively, whereas others may respond in a negative manner that may ultimately lead to less favourable outcomes for them in the future. Thus, it is clear that the transition from primary to secondary school is a vital time in a young person's life and a journey that warrants further exploration. To this end this research was undertaken with a view to filling the existing **gaps** in transition research in Ireland. It focused on listening to both young peoples' **and** teachers' **voices**. It also examined transition in a **holistic** way. A brief exploration of each of these aspects of the research will now be outlined.

**Filling the research gap:** Although the importance of the primary to secondary school transition is widely acknowledged, our understanding of this phenomenon is limited, due to the gap that exists in what little research has been carried out internationally in this area (Sirsch, 2003). I feel that this, without question, is certainly still true in the Irish context. This research, through the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods, aimed to

address the dearth of established research in the Irish context by exploring young people and teachers' experiences of the transition from primary to secondary school.

**Listening to peoples' voices:** Listening to student's and teacher's transition accounts provided an insight into what works and what doesn't work for young people in terms of ensuring more favourable outcomes for them during the transition period. This insight is highly desirable and extremely valuable in the way in which it will feed into and meaningfully shape the subsequent exploration and formulation of a framework for good practice. This framework will be essential in providing others with a map that will guide them in their endeavours to support all young people who make the transition from primary to secondary school in Ireland.

**A holistic focus on both positive and negative aspects of transition:** Much of the existing transition research that was been carried out has tended to focus predominantly on unsuccessful transitions and on the many potential and complex reported negative impacts that many aspects of the transition can have on a young person's holistic development. Some literature relates to how young person can experience a drop in academic attainment (Roderick, 1993), as well as declines in school satisfaction and attitude to others (Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987). Young people can also experience decreases in levels of self-efficacy and self-esteem (Blyth, Simmons & Carlton-Ford, 1983). However, the research undertaken in this instance explored transition through a holistic lens and explored both the positive and negative aspects of transition as experienced by young people and teachers. This was a different approach to seeking out and focusing solely on the potential negative aspects of the transition journey.

As this research was guided by a holistic view of the young person, it set out to explore any potential positive and negative impacts that this transition journey may have on the young person as an individual. Previous research has looked at the effects of transition on various outcomes. For example, some studies have explored the impact that has on achievement and school



attainment levels across the transition (Demetriou, Goalen & Ruddick, 2000). Other studies have explored the effects on peer relationships (Pratt & George, 2005) and levels of victimisation (Pellegrini & Long, 2002) whilst other studies have addressed changes in such factors as quality of life (Gillison, Standage & Skevington, 2008), emotional competencies (Qualter, Whiteley, Hutchinson, & Pope, 2007) and optimism, hostility and adjustment (Boman & Yates, 2001). This research aimed to explore the impact on the 'self'. To this end, this research operationalised the self in terms of 'self-esteem'. I choose to examine transition and self-esteem because of the strong links that have been made between a person's self-esteem levels and a person's resilience, initiative and overall well-being (Bauneister, Campbell, Kruger & Vohs, 2003) However, although the concept of self-esteem plays an important role in this research, this research predominantly related to an exploration of the transition between primary and secondary school and was not wholly concerned with adolescent self-esteem per se.

### **1.3: Rationale for the Research**

The present research was designed and undertaken in response to a need to address the gaps existing in international research relating to transition, especially in the Irish context. It was also undertaken with a view to exploring the many issues around transition that I observe, as an Educational Psychologist (EP), who supports young people, families and schools. My social constructionist view of the transition process and the experiences of young people and teachers informed my decision to adopt a phenomenological and predominantly qualitative approach to gathering the research data. I believed that this approach would provide the answers to my research questions. Therefore, I designed and undertook this research with a view to listening to the voices of the young people who were making the move to secondary school and their teachers who experience the transition of young people on a yearly basis. Their voices and what they had to say mattered to me, as I believed that all pieces of the transition jig-saw had to be examined if any truly meaningful and relevant changes around best practice were to take place in the future.

Gathering the views of people, and young people in particular, was a guiding principal in this research. Pietarinen (2000) feels that the voice of the pupils, who experience change, has been regarded with minor importance. However, the voice of young people is vital when one considers the work of Galton and Morrison (2000) who caution that if teachers and policy makers are to manage transitions effectively, they need to listen more carefully to what pupils have to say on these matters.

Learning from peoples' stories is even more important when we consider the findings of Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm and Spittgerber (2000) who feel that facilitating successful transitions requires that attention be paid to students' preparedness for the transition and the kinds of support students need before, during and after the transition. They concluded that this can best be done through a qualitative approach that allows young people to share their thoughts, feelings and views.

In addition to lessons learned from previous research, this research also had its genesis in many aspects of my professional responsibilities and my work in schools, especially in relation to transition. While working with both primary and secondary school staff, it became apparent to me that schools, at times, tended to behave in a way that was in line with how previous research described schools' responses to transition (Galton & Morrison, 2000). It was evident that the schools behaved in a way that ensured that the transition from primary to secondary school for every pupil was administratively efficient, without paying too much regard to the pupil's personal and social needs or listening to what young people have to say. Arising from conversations with school staff, it became apparent that much of the work around transition being done in the primary school tended to focus on familiarising students with aspects of the secondary school, based on a visit to the new setting. Much of the work also concentrated on transferring information to the secondary school and did not involve the young people at all.

During the initial stage of discussing the possibility of this piece of work being undertaken in collaboration with schools, I had a sense that every school was

ready to review their current practice. School staff expressed an interest in implementing appropriate changes if necessary. This need to change and willingness to engage in a process of change, as expressed by the schools, provided me with an ideal opportunity to undertake this research and engage with schools in a dual role as school psychologist and critical friend.

This research was also undertaken in response to my sense that a discrepancy existed between the schools' transition practices and what some young people often reported to me as being important for them. The reality seemed to be that student's fears, anxieties and expectations around such issues as "being thrown over the wall", "making friends", and "reading timetables" were not being addressed in the primary and secondary school systems in a structured way. Some of the students' concerns may have been addressed in the more formally designed (policy) curriculum areas such as Religion and Social, Emotional and Health Education and the less formal practiced (teacher) curriculum.

However, I felt strongly that young people had no formal forum in which to voice their needs or anxieties, and engage in meaningful pre-transition and post-transition learning that was based on their actual experiences. The majority of teachers appeared to have little awareness of what the real concerns were for young people as they prepared for and adjusted to the transition from primary to secondary school. Thus, it was with a view to exploring more appropriate teaching and learning experiences for young people and their teachers, that this research was undertaken and commissioned by the schools involved.

This research acknowledges the publication of *School Matters: the Report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools* (Department of Education and Science, 2006). This seminal document included a recommendation that all schools adopt a more proactive approach to facilitating a smoother transition from primary to secondary school. However, with a view to embedding good practice across the system the importance of the student voice was conspicuous by its absence.

#### **1.4: Aims of the Research**

As the researcher is a practicing educational psychologist, who was at the time of this research engaged in an applied doctoral training programme, I undertook this research with a number of broad research aims in mind. The primary aim was to engage with young people and their teachers in a respectful and ethically sensitive way that allowed and enabled me to listen to what they had to say about their experience of transition. This listening, I hoped, would enable me to incorporate their voices into a framework for action that would ensure more favourable outcomes for all young people, teachers and schools in the future. As a practicing EP, I wanted this research to add something positive to our understanding of the primary to secondary school transition process. As an EP who was engaged in an applied doctorate, I felt strongly that something that could be applied and used in the real world of schools and transition should come out of this process. The importance of reader accessibility, in terms of the final write up having meaning for as wide an audience as possible, was also an important aspect of this overall process.

Through listening to the young people and teachers and engaging in an up-to-date review of literature pertaining to transition, a number of research questions were explored. The strength of this research, I believed, was that it would enable me to harness the power of peoples' individual and collective voices, in facilitating change that mattered to them. This would be true for both young people and teachers. The principle of the research was one of working with and for people rather than working on them. To this end the proposed research questions are as follows:

1. Do young people's experiences of the transition from primary to secondary school have a positive or negative effect on their self-esteem, as measured by the self rating self-esteem measure?
2. What do young people tell us about their experience of the primary to secondary school transition journey?
3. What factors, during the transition journey, do some young people

attribute to a decrease in their self-esteem levels?

4. What factors, during the transition journey, do some young people attribute to an increase in their self-esteem levels?
5. What do primary school teachers tell us about their experiences of working with young people who make the transition from primary to secondary school?
6. What do secondary school teachers tell us about their experiences of working with young people who make the transition from primary to secondary school?
7. How can we manage the primary to secondary school transition in a way that ensures favourable outcomes for all?

### **1.5: Relevance to Role and Professional Practice**

At the time of this research, I was working, as a full-time educational psychologist, with a National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS) in Ireland. This school-based service employs over 173 psychologists. The service mission is to support the personal, social and educational development of all children, through the application of psychological theory and practice in education, having particular regard to children with special education needs. The NEPS Model of Service (MOS, 2004) is a framework which guides psychologists as they strive to achieve a balance between consultation and individual casework around named children. My ongoing best hope, in terms of developing my professional practice, is that of developing a model of service delivery which is more preventative and developmental in nature and which promotes and places a greater value on work of a more supportive and developmental nature. Thus, exploring transition provided a wonderful opportunity for me.

At the time of this research, my working area consisted of five secondary schools and 30 primary schools, all of which are within a wide geographical and predominantly rural area. At the beginning of each academic year, a planning meeting took place in each school. The purpose of this meeting was to facilitate a review the each school's needs and concerns. Each meeting

facilitated the emergence of a jointly agreed initial plan of how best to provide a service to that school in the coming year. It was helpful to consider how a balance could be achieved between individual casework and support and development work. A review of how the plan worked out in practice took place at the end of the school year.

In the past, I have found that individual casework and assessment, in order to gain access to resources, is what schools tend to prioritise. However, due to changes in the way in which resources are provided to support children and young people with special educational needs (SEN), I see that the focus of my requested psychological service delivery is changing, with a new emphasis being placed on systemic work. Fortunately, I find that I am now in a greater position to work in a systemic and preventive way with schools.

In working with the many schools in my “patch”, I adhere closely to the NEPS MOS which outlines best practice around casework within a consultative process. This is a three-staged approach to assessment that advocates the implementation of ‘Classroom Support’ once initial concerns have been noted. The next stage, which offers greater support, is usually the ‘School Support’ stage and involves the implementation of new interventions outside the classroom setting. The final stage is the ‘School Support Plus’ stage and involves more formal assessment procedures. Throughout all three stages, I work with teaching staff and support staff within a consultative framework. However, as a young person moves through each stage, the level and intensity of consultancy and direct involvement that I provide increases proportionally.

It was with the hope of working with schools in a more supportive way that I decided to carry out a needs analysis on one aspect of education that I felt could be developed within this area. This wish to offer schools support around more systemic issues that could potentially lead to more favourable outcomes for all young people, set the stage for the transition journey between primary and secondary school to be explored and developed.

## **1.6: Geographical Context of the Research**

Within the context of my professional practice, I think that the geographical context of the schools participating in this research lended itself greatly to the exploration of the transition process as experienced by young people, teachers and schools.

The secondary school in question is fed by 13 feeder primary schools and is the only secondary school in this particular region, the nearest alternative secondary school being some 25 miles away.

The geographical context means that all of the young people transferring from the 13 feeder primary schools normally go to this secondary school. This means that the element of 'choice' is taken out of the transition process. It also ensures that every young person experiences a broadly similar transition process in relation to the pre-transition and post transition support that they receive from the secondary school in question.

This geographical remoteness has certain implications for the secondary school in question. On the whole, I believe that the absence of competition from other secondary schools has potentially enabled this secondary school to become comfortable with little or no change taking place in transition practices, policies and procedures. This has possibly had a drip down effect in the terms of what the primary schools are willing or able to do in relation to current transition provision. Therefore, the current situation appears to be that little or no exploration of transition procedures, practices and policies has taken place to date. Therefore, this research had much to offer in terms of facilitating change and looking at good practice for the future.

## **1.7: Original and Distinctive Contribution to Educational Psychology**

Beaver (2003) refers to the role of a researcher psychologist in the following way:

The key skills for a psychologist in working with the system are not in terms of trying to build a hypothesis around the **behaviour which is causing concern**, but more often than not it is about motivating the members of the system to behave differently in order to promote change in the functioning of that system. (p.168)

Beaver's proposition is a fundamental belief of mine and this belief was instrumental in my decision to undertake this research relating to the transfer from primary to secondary school.

Using Beaver's (2003) assertion as a framework, it is possible to explain this research in terms of what I have observed can happen around transition in schools. Based on discussions with school staff, "behaviour which is causing concern" can become a reality for the secondary school after young people have made the transition. These concerns can bring about a new awareness that some of the new entrants can be finding it difficult to adjust to various aspects of the transition from their old primary school to the new secondary school. The school staff can often be at a loss as to the nature of the difficulty. They may explain the difficulty in terms of within child factors. Support for the young person can often be haphazard as it is sometimes hoped and assumed that this change in behaviour is transient. However, when the difficulty persists, as often is the case, the school becomes more concerned and seeks support around addressing the issue. Quite often, I find that this happens too late.

Thus, keeping these young people in mind, I decided to carry out this research with a view to exploring and establishing how EPs can go about 'motivating the members of the system to behave differently in order to promote change in the functioning of that system'. Through listening to the voices of students and school staff, I intended to offer a specific, unique and focused framework for transition that would promote more favourable outcomes for all young people and schools. This unique framework, specific to the Irish context, provides an insight into changes that can be made in both the primary and secondary school settings, in response to the experiences, views and insights as expressed by the young people and teachers.



This research has an important role to play in terms of addressing a number of issues in the area of educational psychology. This research enables the researcher and all EPs, to develop knowledge and skills around a life phase that all young people have to live through. Thus, there is potential for all young people, as opposed to only a few, to benefit from this systemic, preventative work. In a broad sense, this research offers an answer to the individual casework versus support and development question. It also provides an alternative view of how EPs can best manage their workload, in a way which benefits every young person in a more positive way.

The Psychology Service, in which I am employed, is a relatively new service and is therefore still in an embryonic stage in terms of policy development. The relevance of the nature of the transition process from primary to secondary school is an issue, which I believe in the future, will become more important in terms of the ever evolving role of the EP. Therefore, I believe that this research will have a role to play in guiding the development of any future service and departmental policy around transition practices. It also can assist EPs and EP services in developing frameworks for good practice.

Within the Irish context, it is evident that some primary and secondary schools have a very ad hoc and insular approach to supporting students around transition. At present, no formal, structured, universal approach is evident. This research stresses, for EPs, the importance of supporting school systems around the development of future approaches and frameworks for good transition practice. Through the development of a common language, this research also empowers and enables primary schools, secondary schools, and EPs to work in a collaborative way around transition.

### **1.8: Chapter Summary**

Thus far, it has been established that the primary to secondary school transition journey is an important journey that all young people in Ireland have to go through at some stage in their lives and educational careers. Little research has been carried out into the transition process in Ireland and much

of the existing international research has tended to be negative in its focus. In most research, the voice of people, especially the young person who experiences the transition journey, is conspicuous by its absence. This research aimed to explore transition in a different way.

The rationale for and context for this research, its focus, aims and objectives have been outlined. This research, by building on existing knowledge, aimed to create a new understanding of transition in Ireland. This new understanding has implications for young people, schools, educational psychologists and the services in which they work. Arising from this new understanding, a unique and novel framework for transition is proposed.

### **1.9: Structure of this Thesis**

This thesis, which details the research process that took place, assists the reader, to enter into the exploration of the transition, from primary to secondary school in an Irish context. Chapter 1, the Introduction, has detailed the overall context for the research. Chapter 2 outlines the review of the literature relating to transition. Following this, Chapter 3 reviews issues relating to Methodology. This is followed by Chapter 4 which details the research findings. Chapter 5 offers a discussion of the research findings and the implications of those findings. The final Chapter outlines the conclusions that can be made from the research findings and suggests possible areas for research in the future.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1: Overview of Chapter**

This chapter, which reviews existing thinking about transition and research that has been carried out into the primary to secondary school transition process, is important as it sets the scene and context for this research. This chapter will begin with an outline of the literature research criteria (2.2). Following this, an introduction to transition will be provided (2.3) followed by a more specific look at the primary to secondary school transition (2.4). This will be followed by a broad exploration of some existing international research into the primary to secondary school transition process and then a more focused exploration of research that has taken place more specifically in Ireland (2.5). Frameworks that offer something in terms of supporting young people around any challenge will be outlined (2.6). This will be followed by a model for understanding the young people, as adolescents, who make the transition from primary to secondary school (2.7). Research into transition and self esteem will be explored (2.8). This will be followed by a presentation of a number of conceptual frameworks that can offer guidance in terms of developing thinking about school transitions (2.9) with particular attention being paid to Ecological systems Theory (2.10). An explanation of how this research provides an understanding of the transition process within an Irish context (2.11) will be described before reiterating the research questions (2.12). This chapter will conclude with a summary of what has been learned (2.13).

### **2.2 Literature Research Criteria**

This review of literature relating to this research marked the end of initial systematic and extensive literature search carried out between January 2005 and December 2011. The purpose of this review section is to provide an overall context for where this research fits into the big picture (Mertens, 2005) of what is known the primary to secondary school transition.

There is no prescribed way of conducting a literature review. However, with a view to proceeding in a systematic fashion that enabled me to capture, evaluate and summarise the literature, I made reference to frameworks for conducting literature searches as outlined by Creswell (2003) and Mertens (2005).

This initial search covered three main areas or themes that I felt were appropriate and a best fit in terms of my research. These areas were as follows:

1. Transition
2. Transition and self esteem.
3. Specific conceptual frameworks.

Once I had identified these three key areas, the search words were incorporated into a search strategy (Mertens, 2005) which explored search engines such as Google and Google Scholar and databases such as PsychINFO and PsychArticles. This facilitated the location of journal articles, conference papers, useful web sites, and books that seemed relevant to the current research. In addition to the World Wide Web, I found useful sources in real time settings such as the University of East London Library, and through a facility which Mertens (2005) refers to as Personal Networking. This involved discussions with colleagues, and university staff. The overall search culminated in the following resources being available to me:

1. Research articles that were concerned with the primary to secondary school **transition** or equivalent transitions. These articles had to focus on international research relating to adolescent mainstream school transitions. A total of 50 articles were compiled in this instance and 10 of these articles were identified as seminal articles that would be examined in greater depth in the formal review of the literature. The main foci for analysis were the **focus** of the research and the **methodology** employed. These articles are identifiable in the reference section by the use of a single asterisk.

2. Research articles that examined adolescent school transitions and its effects on adolescent **self esteem**. A total of 20 articles were identified in this instance. A final total of eight of these articles were considered as central to the research and examined to a greater level. These articles are identifiable in the reference section by the use of a double asterisk.
3. Literature which was concerned with the theoretical frameworks that I had chosen to make reference to in my research. These frameworks were as follows: Life Transitions, Models of Support, Psychology of Adolescent, Stage-environment Fit, Arenas of Comfort, Transition and Inclusion, Mindset Theory and Ecological Systems Theory.

Having secured the relevant sources that focused on international research relating to the school transitions of adolescents in mainstream education, transition and self esteem and conceptual frameworks related to my research, I then set about becoming familiar with the themes contained within the vast amount of information I had gathered. I then began the process of putting a shape on the format that I wanted the literature review to take. The final format began with an exploration of transition. It then narrowed in focus to examine the school transition and school transitions and self-esteem. The literature review concluded with the conceptual frameworks that underpinned the research being presented.

### **2.3: An Introduction to Transition**

Transitions and journeys are a part of life. For people to grow and develop, transitions have to be made. Whilst some transitions can be seamless and made without even realising it, others can be challenging and difficult. At such times people can benefit from the support of those around them. This research explored one such life transition, that being the transition between primary and secondary school. However, before attempting to explore this specific transition, it was important to have a broad insight into the nature of life transitions in general.

### **2.3.1: The Primary to Secondary School Transition in Ireland**

This transition time in Ireland mirrors the move from primary to secondary that takes place in the United Kingdom or roughly equates to the move that young people make from middle school to high school in the United States. Although little research has taken place into this transition time in Ireland, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO, 2009), which is a national union to which a sizable majority of primary school teachers belong, has welcomed the fact that the transition from primary school to secondary school has begun to receive more attention.

In exploring the development of the primary to secondary school transition in Ireland, it is important to take a brief look at the development of the Irish Education System in terms of policy. In 1966, free secondary education for all was introduced. This led to a significant increase in the number of young people who attended secondary school. This, naturally enough, left many secondary schools struggling to cope with a larger body of students who previously may not have had the chance to go onto secondary school. In response to this, the Department of Education commissioned and published the *Report of the Pupil-Transfer Committee* (1978). This report aimed to report and make recommendations on the difficulties that were evident in the education system relating to the transition from primary to secondary school. A primary challenge seemed to relate to the difference that existed between "child-centred primary schools and the subject-centred post-primary schools" (p.5). The report highlighted bullying and loneliness as some potential barriers to successful transitions. It was reported that 20% of young people making the transition around that time experienced transition difficulties. In response to this, the report recommended that major curriculum and methodological changes should and needed to take place with a view to facilitating smoother transition processes. Thus, the notion of follow-on rather than fresh start was emerging with an emphasis on curriculum continuity rather than curriculum discontinuity. This acknowledgement did address some of the difficulties surrounding the primary to secondary school transition. However, the reality is

that little changed in actual transition practices and little changed in terms of the transition being viewed through a much wider lens.

A significant milestone in Irish Education was the publication of the *White Paper* in 1995. This paper considered the key aspects of education to be quality, equality, pluralism, partnership, accountability, the promotion of equality of access and participation for all and the provision of additional resources to support children at risk of failure. Although this paper did not directly relate to the transition process per se, it did have implications when considering transition as a major piece in the educational jigsaw. It helped in the consideration of transition as a process that is worthy of greater attention and heralded a shift in how the transition process was regarded. However, little was done in terms of follow up work and ultimately little changed in relation to the primary to secondary school transition practice in Ireland.

The introduction of the Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999) stressed the centrality of the special relationship that needs to exist between primary and secondary schools. Once again the Curriculum promoted a consistency of curricular approach between primary and secondary schools. Consistency around assessment was also highlighted. However apart from this, little changed.

### **2.3.2: Life Transitions-A Working Model**

Schlossberg, Waters and Goodman (1995) defined a transition as “any event, or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles” (p.27).

Early work by Schlossberg (1981) saw the emergence of Schlossberg’s ‘Transition Theory’. This theory was valuable in the way in which it described transition as a means of “analyzing human adaptation to transition” (p.2). This early model of transition, which adopted an interactional view of transition (Banner, 1991), as opposed to process-stage view as posited by Kubler Ross (1969), asserted that adaptation is affected by the interaction of three sets of

variables: the person's perception of the transition, characteristics of the pre-transition and post-transition environments and the characteristics of the individual. Schlossberg later changed the word "response" for "adaptation" as her thinking evolved to the realisation that adaptation may not always be achieved.

Later work by Schlossberg, Waters and Goodman (1995) modified and refined this Transition Theory. They formulated another theory that continued to offer an insight into factors related to the transition, including the individual and the environment that are likely to have a bearing on one's ability to cope with a transition. This theory has traditionally been thought of as a theory of adult development. However, Evans, Forney and DiBrito (1998) successfully used the theory to help students make the transition from second level education to college. As someone who adopts a life span view of transition, I was interested in using this theory as a way of promoting a greater understanding of the primary to secondary school transition process. This new perspective, I believed, could enable schools, parents and young people themselves to cope more successfully with the transition from primary to secondary school.

In terms of transition, Schlossberg et al. (1995) suggested that a person can experience any one of three types of transition in their lives. An **anticipated** transition is a transition that a person knows is going to happen such as the transition between primary and secondary school. An **unanticipated** transition is a transition that cannot be foreseen, planned or scheduled for such as the sudden death of someone. A **non-event** is a transition that is expected but does not occur, such as a person's unsuccessful application to secure a university place.

In the case of anticipated transitions or in this case school transitions, Schlossberg et al. (1995) suggested that dealing with these types of transition is a process that takes place over time with an individual essentially moving from a pre-occupation with the transition to an integration of the transition. They posited that the time required to successfully integrate a transition will



vary from person to person. Every anticipated transition and indeed every transition can have positive outcomes for an individual. However, transitions can equally have negative outcomes. Despite the eventual outcomes, anticipated transitions consist of a series of phases. These are what Schlossberg et al. (1995) referred to as “moving in”, “moving through” and “moving out”.

In terms of a person making a successful or unsuccessful transition, Schlossberg et al. (1995) identified four sets of factors, known as the 4 Ss, that can contribute to favourable or unfavourable outcomes: **situation, self, support and strategies**. These factors are important in determining how a person will cope with a transition, with an individual’s coping ability very much dependent on his/her strengths (assets) and weaknesses (liabilities) with regard to these four areas while moving in, moving through and moving out of a transition.

A brief analysis of each of the 4 Ss is important in contributing to an understanding of the role each of them plays as a person copes with an anticipated transition, in this case the transition being the primary to secondary school transition journey. A clear and simple framework, adapted from the work of Schlossberg et al. (1995), outlining the 4 Ss and their role in helping one to cope with transition, has been provided by Evans, Forney and Guido-DiBrito (1998).

**Situation:** trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experience, concurrent stress, assessment.

**Self:** personal and demographic characteristics (socio-economic status, gender, age, stage of life, health, ethnicity), psychological resources (ego development, outlook, commitment, values).

**Support:** types (intimate, family, friends, institutional), functions (affect, affirmation, aid, honest feedback), measurement (role dependent, stable and changing supports).

**Strategies:** categories (modify situation, control meaning, manage stress in aftermath), coping modes (information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action).

The 4 Ss are important in determining how a person copes with a transition. However, equally important is one's appraisal of the transition with two possible types of appraisal being made. Primary appraisal has to do with whether a person perceives the transition as positive, negative or irrelevant whereas secondary appraisal has to do with a person's self assessment of his/her resources for coping with the impending transition.

The implications of this framework, in the context of the present research, are many. Firstly, it is clear that the transition between primary and secondary school is an anticipated event through which the majority of young people move into, move through and move out of. Thus, the transition process can be seen as a continuum which can be planned for, planned during and reviewed afterwards. Secondly, the interactional nature of the model, which outlines the interaction between factors relating to the transition, the individual and the environment, draws attention to the fact that young people are not passive passengers who travel the transition journey in isolation. It becomes clear that the journey can be managed on a variety of levels. The transition journey and the environments relating to the journey can be carefully managed to ensure favourable outcomes for young people. Equally important is the reality that young people can be enabled and empowered, with the support of others, to manage their own journey as efficiently and effectively as possible. In this manner, this theory challenges people to manage the change rather than letting things unfold in an ad hoc manner. This theory calls for action rather than passivity and is dynamic in its approach.

Matching this model with what established knowledge informs us of young people at this crucial stage in their lives, it is possible for schools to secure an appropriate stage-environment fit (Eccles & Midgley, 1989) or person-environment fit (Hunt, 1975). A good fit ensures that the support provided for young people is developmentally and environmentally appropriate. It also

ensures that support is matched to young peoples' collective and individual strengths and areas of need. This distinction between the herd and the individual is vital if we are to ensure more favourable outcomes for all young people.

### **2.3.3: The School Transition as a Process**

Each year in Ireland over 50 thousand young people make the transition from primary to secondary school. This 'rite de passage' or 'status passage' (Measor & Woods, 1984) marks a time of change in the young person's life and is a passage in status from being one kind of a person with certain rights and expectations to another. Measor and Woods (1984) posit that the primary to secondary school transition can be particularly traumatic because it involves not one status passage but three. The transition involves the physical and cultural passage of adolescence that is referred to as puberty. It involves the informal passage within and between peer cultures and friendship groups where different and new kinds of friendships are experienced and expected. It also involves the formal passage between two different kinds of institutions with different regulations, curriculum demands and teacher expectations. In addition to these three passages, the transition journey can be further complicated by the fact that a number of bridges need to be crossed.

### **2.3.4: Bridges to be Crossed**

At the beginning of the exploration of the specifics of the primary to secondary school transition journey, I found it useful to conceptualise the process in terms of a bridge which young people have to cross. In relation to what young people need to make a successful transition from primary to secondary school, Galton, Grey and Ruddick (1999) identified two primary bridges or five secondary bridges that need to be crossed during this time. It is crucial that each bridge is crossed successfully with each bridge requiring a particular type of support. These bridges and some examples of what they entail are as follows:

## 1. The Social/Organisational Bridge

This bridge is made up of the Bureaucratic, Social and Emotional and Curriculum bridges. Each of these explained briefly is as follows:

**The Bureaucratic Bridge:** This is the formal liaison between primary and secondary schools and usually occurs at senior management level. It is concerned with transfer of information, records, test results and work samples.

**The Social and Emotional Bridge:** This includes the development of social links, positive relationships and connections with new friends and teachers before and after the transition. It can be reinforced by enabling young people to make new relationships, cope with change and overcome new difficulties. Help seeking strategies, personal development programmes, social skills training, getting used to new and unfamiliar changes are the focus of teaching and learning here.

**The Curriculum Bridge:** This entails the sharing of teaching plans by teachers on both sides of the bridge. Plans can address cross phase teaching, joint teaching, bridging units, summer schools, joint training days and subject continuity.

## 2. The Academic Bridges

Transition schemes, claim Galton et al. (1999) need to address academic bridges also. This is required to support young people around the reported academic dip that some can experience after the transition to secondary school. Galton et al. (1999) suggest the need to develop plans for initiatives that focus on academic as well as the social aspects of transition. The Academic Bridge is made up of the Pedagogy and Management of Learning Bridges. Each of these explained briefly are as follows:

**The Pedagogy Bridge:** This bridge is characterised by the development of a shared understanding of how young people are taught and not simply what they are taught. It considers shared exploration and understanding of teaching skills and styles, teacher perspectives on learning, teacher exchanges.

**The Management of Learning Bridge:** This bridge explores how young people can be empowered and enabled to manage their transition and be given the confidence to express their needs in the new environment. It looks at induction procedures, learner logs, study skills, metacognitive skills, inclusion activities and so on.

I find the metaphor of the five bridges to be crossed as very useful in creating a concise yet all inclusive understanding of the primary to secondary school transition process. Some people may criticise this model in response to the fact that only two of the five bridges are young person focused. However, this I believe, is a strength of the model in that it draws attention to the reality that the transition is concerned with much more than just the needs of young people. Rather than viewing transition as a single, complicated event, it breaks the transition from primary to secondary school process down into manageable components and ensures that all aspects of the transition process can be addressed, managed and catered for. It becomes clear that a successful transition for young people and schools should be concerned with a lot more than the mere sharing of information. It is imperative that transition is regarded through a wider lens that acknowledges the complexity of the transition in terms of all of the five bridges that need to be crossed.

Although it is in every young person's best interest that they successfully cross the transition bridges, Naughton (2003) speculates that the alienation of many young people and their initial disengagement with their education may be traced back to this crucial transition period. This is something that I have observed in my work in secondary schools. For instance, at the time of this research, it was reported to me that two young people were finding the transition from primary to secondary school as challenging. As time progressed their willingness to come to school decreased and eventually they

stopped attending. Once this happened, it was extremely difficult to get these young people to re-engage with the secondary school. I firmly believe that the unsuccessful transition had a negative impact on these young people's attitude to school and their overall school experience.

The transition process is further complicated by the reality of the systemic differences that can exist between primary and the secondary school cultures. Eccles and Roeser (1996) concluded that 5 patterns of difference have emerged with a fair sense of consistency. Primary school classrooms when compared to secondary school classrooms are characterised by a greater emphasis on teacher control and discipline and allow fewer opportunities for student decision making, choice and self management. Less personal and positive teacher student relationships are evident in secondary schools and an increase in such practices as whole-class task organisation, ability grouping and different forms of assessment becomes evident. A higher standard in judging a student's skills and competence and in grading their performance is evident in primary classrooms as are higher levels of teachers who question their effectiveness and teacher efficacy.

Having examined the complexity of the transition from primary to secondary school transition process, it is important to examine some research that has been carried out in this area.

## **2.4: Research and Thinking on Transition**

There is a large established body of literature on the primary to secondary school transition journey.

### **2.4.1: Transition as Negative**

Having established a clear and concise picture of what the transition journey entails, it is valuable to consider the primary to secondary school transition at a deeper level. When exploring the large body of literature relating to and

describing school transition, there appears to be a negativity that surrounds this process. Authors refer to transition as being a stressful event (Deihl, Vicary & Deike, 1997; Fenzel, 1989), a challenging time (Bronstein, 1996), difficult and problematic (Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm & Splittgerber, 2000), confusing and challenging (Ward, 2001), complicated and difficult to understand (Rudduck, 1996), traumatic (Hawk and Hill, 2001) and personally disastrous (Mizelle and Irwin, 2000). In general the language associated with transition tends to be less than kind.

A large body of existing transition research focuses on the perceived negative effects of school transition, with the primary to secondary school transition reported to have a very negative effect on the psychological, social and intellectual wellbeing of students (Elias, Gara, & Ubriaco, 1985; Kagan & Neuman, 1998). Psychologically, students have been found to experience a decrease in self-esteem, sense of belonging, and the ability to cope with stressors (Alspaugh, 1998; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999). Social problems that have been associated with school transitions have included changes in peer friendships, changes in teachers, and the loss of friends as students move to different schools (Hirsch & DuBois, 1992). In regard to intellectual wellbeing, researchers have found that school transitions have a negative effect on students' academic performance (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999) and on academic motivation (Schumacher, 1998).

#### **2.4.2: Young Peoples' Perceptions of Transition**

Transition researchers have not only measured the effects of school transitions, they have examined young peoples' perceptions of the transition experience (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Letrello & Miles, 2003; Yates, 1999). As research has most commonly and predominantly utilised quantitative methods (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Berndt, Miller, & Park, 1989; Feldlaufer, Midgley, & Eccles, 1988; Fenzel, 1989; Harter, Whitesell, & Kowalski, 1992; Lord, Eccles, & McCarthy, 1994; Mitman & Packer, 1982) the need for qualitative research,

which enables young people to have a voice, has been recognised (Johnstone, 2001, 2002; Kinney, 1993; Letrello & Miles, 2003; Yates, 1999).

I believe that the meaning and perception of the transition experience from the young peoples' perspective requires qualitative methods that allow students to 'tell it like it is' for them. As quantitative research, by its very design, can funnel participant responses towards particular concerns, results may not reflect the true experiences as expressed by participants. This may in part explain the predominance of negative consequences reported in the school transition literature (Alspaugh, 1998; Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, Reuman, Mac Iver, & Feldlaufer, 1993; Reyes, Gillock, Kobus, & Sanchez, 2000).

#### **2.4.3: Pre-transition Research**

Regarding pre-transition research, Sirsch (2003) posits that little is known about how young people feel about the impending primary to secondary school transition. Some information regarding young peoples' pre-transition feelings is provided by Mizelle and Irvin (2000) who concluded, through their use of qualitative research methods, that the average Eight Grade student in America is both excited and concerned about going to high school. They tend to look forward to more freedom, more choices, new extra-curricular activities and new friendships. They tend to be scared or nervous around bullying, getting lost, much harder work and bad grades.

The findings of Mizelle and Irvin (2000) are echoed in the findings of Zeedyk, Gallaher, Henderson, Hope, Husband and Lindsay (2003) who reported the findings of United Kingdom based research into the perceptions of pupils, parents and teachers around the transition from primary to secondary school. Results indicated that young people look forward to new friends, new subjects, new teachers, new routine, extra curricular activities, learning challenges, and being grown up. Young people worry about bullying, getting lost, peer relations, workload, new academic subjects, new environment, new teachers, being the youngest again, new routines and academic performance.



#### **2.4.4: The Story of Emily**

A very comprehensive and generic exploration of the transition experiences of young people, and one young person in particular named Emily, was commissioned by the Ministry of Education in New Zealand. The final report (Kennedy & Cox, 2008) provides a very thorough and useful insight into what happens for young people at this time. The 'Emily Report', which presented key findings, concluded that the primary to secondary schooling (Year 8-9) transition is not the disaster that is often feared and that most students quickly adapt to the more immediate changes inherent in the move from primary to secondary school, such as finding their way around the new school, moving classes, and becoming familiar with different rules and routines. The research highlighted that the transition did not represent a time of significant, deeper level-change for students and was not generally unsettling. The report recommended that while Year 8 to Year 9 transition seemed to be commonly thought of as a particular 'event', it should more appropriately be regarded as a 'process', requiring students to make ongoing adjustments over some time.

A brief synopsis of some concerns and challenges, as mentioned by the young people who participated in the above research, related predominantly to such issues as finding one's way around a bigger school with lots of more people, harder things to learn and more homework, stricter school with more rules, sadness around being separated from old friends and worries about making new ones and excitement about the prospect of more opportunities in secondary school especially sports.

#### **2.5: Transition in Ireland**

Every September in Ireland, over 50,000 five year olds start in primary school and so begins the first stage of their formal and compulsory education. Some may have already made the transition from pre-school whereas others may not. Usually, eight years later, this cohort makes the transition to secondary school. By this time the young people are usually twelve or thirteen years of age. After another five or 6 years in the secondary school setting, some of this

cohort may make another transition to a higher education setting. Thus, in their educational careers, some Irish young people may make several educational transitions.

### **2.5.1: Existing Research into Transition in Ireland**

Despite various little movements in thinking around the importance of transition in Irish educational policy, little concentrated and exclusive focus has been placed on this stage of young peoples' educational careers in Ireland.

However, this appeared to change when a primary school teacher published the findings of his doctoral research in *Oideas* (2003). *Oideas* is a journal of the Department of Education and Science. The aim of his research entitled *Primary to Secondary Level Transition Programmes: Rationale, Principles and a Framework* was to lay out principles for the construction of a transition programme for young people moving from primary to second-level schooling in Ireland. The paper opened with a general exploration of the nature of transition. It then flagged a number of important considerations that need to be taken into account when planning for transition. It went on to offer a number of principles that facilitate a more concrete plan or framework for transition and ended by suggesting a number of methods through which a cohesive plan could be embodied in the school experiences of young people.

The value of the contribution of this paper was to draw awareness to the concept of transition and the need to plan for it. It introduced new concepts and a new transition specific language that was accessible to a wide audience of people who worked with young people in transition. It really paved the way for further thought and debate around the transition process. However, the final product fell down in terms of realising an evidence base that drew on the experiences of real people and their real transition experiences. The terminology used related predominantly to schools as organisations. It did not examine what young people had to say. This is something that I wished to address in my research.

In 2004 the first of two significant pieces of research which focussed on the primary to secondary school transition in Ireland were published. These were to provide a very thorough and insightful evidence base into the reality of transition in general.

The first piece of research '*Making the Move*' (O' Brien, 2004) was undertaken with a view to gaining and providing a fuller understanding of the transition process from the perspective of students, parents and teachers who lived in an urban area. In exploring the need for the study, O' Brien (2004) stated that "in Ireland at the time of this research, there has been no major investigation of the transfer of students from first to second-level schooling" (p.86). The research, through the use of semi-structured interviews with 153 students, 74 teachers and 48 parents, sought to identify and explore various factors that contribute to how students perceive and experience the transition from primary to secondary school in the Irish context. The research design placed a value on listening to the voices of the young people who were living the transition.

The main findings of '*Making the Move*' were as follows:

- The transition from primary to secondary is an emotional time for young people. While in primary school, young people can be excited and look forward to many aspects of their new school life; new teachers, new subjects, and bigger school. However, this excitement can be extinguished by the new reality of finding it difficult to make new friends, missing old friends and more study and harder homework. By the end of the first year, most young people have settled and now are focussed on exams.
- In term of formal preparation, the primary schools did little to prepare the young people for the transition. Primary school teachers did worry about how the young people would get on in the new secondary school setting. Both primary and secondary school

teachers wanted greater dialogue and communication between the two systems.

- Peer relations played a significant role in transition. The second level schools had an awareness of the importance of friends at transition time.
- The myths and stories that young people heard in Sixth Class prepared young people for the inversion in their status that they were to go on to experience in secondary school.
- The transfer to secondary school caused changes to occur in young people's lives outside school. More homework meant a curtailment of social activities previously enjoyed.

Through a purely qualitative approach to data collection, *Making the Move* culminated in a series of recommendations that would lead to more favourable outcomes for all young people. O' Brien (2004) effectively drew attention to and stressed the importance of this transition time in the lives of young people and appears to have successfully made appropriate recommendations on additional supports that may benefit young people and help make transition a more worthwhile and successful journey for all.

While acknowledging the value of the research process and the information provided in the very clear, well written and easily accessible language, the final report offers little and adds little in terms of enabling those who work with young people to move forward and bring about positive change in relation to the primary to secondary school transition process. The whole research process comes across as very broad and generic in its focus and extremely descriptive. It does not present as being adequately prescriptive in offering concrete suggestions for change. This could be seen as a strength in terms of challenging people to formulate their own means of bringing about change. However, I believe, it struggles to weave together and apply what has been learned into a meaningful whole that presents more explicit recommendations for change. Such recommendations could have been welcomed as I believe that ideas for change can be appropriate and forceful enablers at times.

The report nicely concluded that “the broad base and exploratory nature of this work indicates that further small scale, focused studies need to target aspects of the transfer process in order to answer questions about the impact of transfer on students” (p.86). This view was kept in mind when the present research was being proposed.

The second piece of research ‘*Moving Up*’ (Smith, McCoy & Darmody, 2005) was undertaken with a view to exploring the experiences of young people, who also lived in an urban area, in adjusting to a new school environment. It drew on a wide range of qualitative information to present the views of the key people involved in the process; 567 school principals, 226 teachers, 81 parents and 916 young people. The main findings of ‘*Moving Up*’ were as follows:

- Schools tended to do the same things around transition preparation. Young people in Sixth Class attended an open day, secondary school teachers visited the primary school to gather information and young people in First Year had an induction day.
- Young people in transition experienced contradictory emotions and experienced challenges around more subjects and teachers, change in status and changes in relationships.
- Young people took longer to settle into secondary school life if they did not know what to expect in secondary school, had poor pre-transition and post transition peer relations, had difficulty with subject choices and learning, and did not experience the new school as a positive place.

At first glance, this appears to be very similar to *Making the Move* as explored above. However, *Moving Up* has more to offer in terms of its application and usefulness in supporting policy development at both the school and national level. It explored implications for policy in the context of real life factors or what I have previously referred to as the ‘nitty gritty’ issues of young peoples’ fears, anxieties and expectations. It is very strong in its call for a generic and

national umbrella policy relating to school transition. It is also enlightening in the manner in which it acknowledges that schools need support if they are to be in a position to support students. This was an important learning experience for me.

The contributions of *Making the Move* and *Moving Up* cannot be underestimated in the manner in which they may have paved the way for the gradual yet meagre emergence of the concept of transition in Department of Education and Science documents and in the Irish educational arena in general. The gradual appreciation of the importance of this time in young peoples' lives may be evidenced in the reference to transition in a later report entitled *Guidance for Life: An integrated Framework for Lifelong Guidance in Ireland* (DES, 2007).

This framework, which aimed to outline the knowledge, skills and competencies people require to become effective lifelong learners and members of society, regarded guidance as a process that facilitates people of all ages (birth -adulthood) to manage their emotional, social, learning and career lives so that they will be in a better position to reach their potential and contribute to a better society. It is heartening to see the concept of "preparedness for transition" (p.16) included and valued in the proposed best practice framework. This was positive.

Although, within the Irish context, there is still a long way to go in terms of addressing the many gaps in transition research, it is positive that a debate has been initiated and interest does exist around transition. Most recent is the *Transitions in the Primary School Report* (INTO, 2009). Even though this is descriptive in nature, it does keep the notion of transition alive in Ireland and does so in a way that is topical and up to date with what is happening internationally.

## **2.6: Supporting Young People in Schools**

The primary to secondary school transition is an important time in every young person's life. Much international research has examined the transition journey. Some research has taken place in Ireland. In addition to examining existing research it is also important to consider research on what has been done to support young people as they make the transition from primary to secondary school.

### **2.6.1: Supporting Young People in Schools - A Generic Support Model**

It is widely accepted and acknowledged that young people, and more importantly adolescents, which are the primary focus of this research, can face numerous challenges as they grow and develop in society today. Exploration of the 'at risk' young person is commonplace. Increasingly however, emphasis is being placed on expanding the focus of prevention, intervention and post-intervention, beyond the 'at risk' young person, to the entire school context as a focus for intervention (Borgmeier, 2007).

In terms of a whole school support intervention, Borgmeier (2007) values the School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support (S-WPBS) model of systemic intervention. This model, he claims, affords young people a highly effective and efficient level of support. This approach to supporting young people around behaviour and the practice framework it enshrines can, I believe, be very successfully applied to supporting young people around many aspects of their development and life in school. The fundamentals of this approach can unquestionably be referenced when exploring ways of supporting all young people as the move in, through and out of the transition between primary and secondary school. What follows is a brief introduction to the approach. It may be useful for a reader to substitute the word transition for the word behaviour as the framework and its basic tenets are outlined below.

Borgmeier (2007) explains that S-WPBS is a multifaceted intervention that draws on and weaves together much established research on (a) effective

instruction, (b) behaviour management and (c) systemic school change. Instead of valuing a reactionary or band-aid response to challenging behaviour, S-WBPS aims at taking a proactive and preventative approach to behaviour management and nurturing a positive school climate. The universal aim of this approach is to enable school staff to develop best practice around behaviour management in their schools. S-WBPS begins with a universal intervention aimed at improving the school climate. What follows are two increasingly intensive support systems for groups of students or individual students who are presenting with more challenging behaviour patterns. This framework or continuum of intervention is most commonly presented as a three-tiered approach to supporting student behaviour. The three-tiered whole school approach to supporting young behaviour acknowledges that different students will need different levels of support at different times and with a view to supporting all students, it is vital that schools have varying levels of responses which can be utilised at any time.

### **2.6.2: Continuum of Support-An Irish Model**

This framework for intervention has been adopted and adapted by the National Educational Psychological Service in the Irish context. In terms of its Model of Service (MOS), which is its framework for supporting young people and schools, NEPs EPs advocate the above framework as packaged in the form of the NEPS developed 'Continuum of Support' (CoS, 2010). As an effective means of supporting young people and school staff, NEPS EPs embed their practice in this 'Continuum of Support' as it is regarded as a comprehensive, effective and manageable framework for action that enables schools to support every young person, regardless of the challenges he/she faces. In general, the CoS encompasses a graduated solution orientated framework of assessment and intervention. It is comprised of three distinct school based processes. These are as follows:

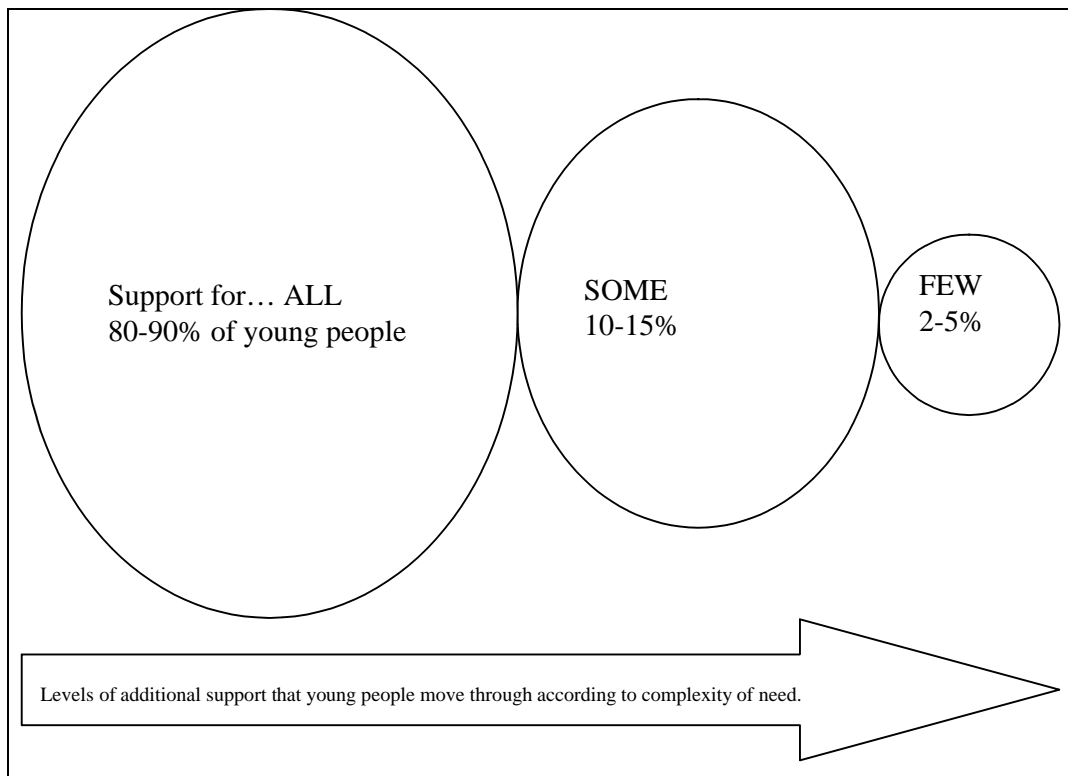
- 1 Support (for ALL): This is predominantly a process of prevention, effective mainstream teaching and early identification. These systems



are available to **all** young people and can very effectively meet the needs of most young people.

- 2 School Support (for **SOME**): This is an assessment and intervention process which is directed to **some** young people, or groups of young people who require additional support.
- 3 School Support plus (for **FEW**): is generally characterised by more intensive individualised supports. This level of support is for young people who present with more complex and enduring needs. Relatively **few** young people will require this level of support. A simple visual representation of the CoS framework is as follows:

Figure 1: NEPS 'Continuum of Support' model for intervention



The focus of the CoS is on identifying actions which need to be and can be taken to ensure more favourable outcomes for all young people. The strength of the framework is that it can be used across all levels of support and can provide a structure to what is offered to young people by means of support

around a wide range of difficulties such as learning difficulties, emotional difficulties, behavioural difficulties, social difficulties and so on.

Within the context of NEPS, this solution orientated framework (Rees, 2001) is much valued as a positive framework for action that creates an environment which acknowledges the challenges that young people can face and offers a framework for doing something positive to support young people. It has very effectively been used to address a wide range of difficulties. Feedback from schools has been very positive. It has successfully been adapted to address learning difficulties, behavioural difficulties, and emotional difficulties and so on. The approach of ALL, SOME and FEW is workable and realistic. I believe that the CoS can be fruitfully used to support all young people around the difficulties they face as they make the transition from primary to secondary school. The CoS framework plays a very big part in the new framework for transition or “Transition Corridor” as developed in this research. The ‘Transition Corridor’ will be explored in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

### **2.6.3: Current Thoughts around Supporting Young People for Transition**

There exists in the literature a myriad of suggestions on how transitions for young people between primary and secondary school can be strengthened. However, we can get lost in attempting to draw a plan of action together based on what is deemed to be effective. However, I am really interested in the contribution made here by the National Strategies Strengthening Transfer and Transitions Project (2008). This initiative for change, I believe, provides a very coherent framework that people can adapt to support young people on their transition journey. Based on the notion of increasing young peoples’ capacity to manage their own learning as they move into, through and out of the primary to secondary school transition, the Department for Children, Schools and Families in the UK and through the National Strategies Strengthening Transfer and Transitions Project (2008) outlines 7 conditions which can be applied to effectively maintain and hopefully raise educational standards during the primary to secondary school transition process. These

conditions, which are enablers in terms of supporting young people in positive and holistic way, are as follows:

1. Transfer and transitions are key drivers to raising standards.
2. Assessment for learning principles underpins progress across transfers and transitions.
3. Pupils need the confidence, understanding and skills to advance their own progress across transfer and transition.
4. Partnership work is essential for effective transfers and transitions for progress.
5. Effective partnerships are built on a common vision, shared responsibility and trust.
6. Partnership working requires mutual understanding through shared experience and a common language.
7. Sustained collaboration requires structures and systems that support formal and ongoing links between partners.

While the seven conditions outlined above provide a feel for the spirit of a transition support programme, the Strengthening Transfers and Transitions Project goes one step further and suggests five pointers that may prove positive in planning for successful transitions. These are Outcomes, Behaviours, Enablers, Understanding and Skills and Attitudes and Beliefs.

The overall framework has proved to be a very positive element in strengthening transitions in the UK based schools that participated in the project (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009). The strength of this framework for me, with the emphasis on assessment, confidence, collaboration, partnership, sharing, and enablers, lies in its capacity to enable stakeholders in an Irish context to have a framework for framing their thinking about transition when attempting to develop a plan of action that suits their particular setting. In short, the framework can be translated into a tailor made, setting-specific operational framework. It puts the onus on schools and educators to acknowledge transition as a crucial time in young peoples' lives and to take responsibility for planning for transition and actively managing

transition as opposed to simply letting it happen. It also places an emphasis on the need to work in collaboration with others and the need to build bridges with others as a means of ensuring more favourable outcomes for all young people.

Young people are at the heart of the primary to secondary school transition. It is young people who have to make the move and it is young people who have to rise to or succumb to the many challenges they may experience along the way. What do we know about young people? What do we need to know about young people if we are to support them as they move into, move through and move out of the primary to secondary school transition? I believe that it is important to know the following which relates to young people as adolescents.

## **2.7: The Psychology of Adolescence**

Adolescence is a period characterised by rapid change and development in the life of a young person. Pinnell (1998) suggests that adolescence is a time when young people **worry** about all sorts of things, **watch** others and judge themselves against their peers, **strive** to achieve a new sense of personal identity, **need** to talk, argue, have privacy, question, tests limits and **bounce back and fourth** between happiness and sadness, self-confidence and self-consciousness, boldness and withdrawal.

Amidst all of this growth and change it has been recognised and acknowledged that adolescence can be a time of great vulnerability (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2003) for young people as they face many new challenges. The transition from primary to secondary is one such challenge. The Committee has discussed the importance of supporting and enabling adolescents, in a way that fosters positive health and development. In an effort to protect and foster the emotional health and well-being of all adolescents, the World Health Organisation (WHO, 1999) explored frameworks for supporting adolescents in a manner that ensures more favourable development patterns, promotes more healthy lifestyles and ensures a healthy environment in which they can grow and develop. In its

framework for supporting adolescent development and health, the WHO has suggested the following as positive outcomes for adolescent development:

- Self worth: enabling young people to contribute and providing a space in which they feel that they are being heard and are making a positive contribution.
- Safely and Structure: Creating a space where young people feel safe both physically and psychologically.
- Belonging and Membership: Creating a space where young people feel part of a community and feel a sense of belonging and experience positive and lasting relationships with others.
- Responsibility and Autonomy: Creating a space where young people feel a sense of control and are respected as individuals with a past, a present and a future.

The WHO sees these outcomes as embedded in a holistic view of adolescence. It suggests that societies must try to enable young people to achieve these goals and provide a nurturing environment that enables young people to grow, develop, adapt, change and achieve more positive levels of health and well-being. This is a valuable framework in terms of supporting young people during a time of great change in their lives, this being the transition from primary to secondary school.

In exploring the concept of adolescence, Lipsitz (1984) posits that “to succeed with young adolescents, schools must be responsive to their developmental needs” (p.6). Thus, it is good practice for schools to have a broad awareness of the developmental needs of adolescents and an understanding of some of the developmental changes that young people between the ages of 10 to 14 can experience.

There is much literature available on change and adolescence. Brinthaup, Lipka and Wallace (2007), in their comment on established literature pertaining to adolescence, note that it is a time of frequent biological, social

and cognitive changes. In relation to the myriad of suggested changes, Kellough and Kellough (2003) offer clarity in their assertion that researchers, experts and practitioners have come to agree upon a general set of common adolescent developmental characteristics, these being physical, intellectual, emotional, social and ethical. They stress that holistic development is reliant on all of these characteristics, all of which are interconnected. Therefore, in terms of young people developing holistically and being enabled to reach their potential, an awareness of each of these five characteristics and a sense of their interconnectiveness is vital for those who strive to support them. This knowledge has implications in terms of developing appropriate practice. This is certainly true when one is planning for the transition between primary and secondary school.

While many researchers find it fruitful to look at specific changes or developmental transitions (Schulenberg, Maggs & Hurrelmann, 1997) that occur in these five characteristics during adolescence, I believe that it is equally worthwhile to explore adolescence in terms of it being a time in one's life where a number of **developmental tasks** (Schulenberg et al. 1997) are to be achieved.

According to Havighurst (1953) a developmental task is one "which arises at or about a certain period in the life of an individual, successful achievement of which leads to his happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by society and difficulty with later tasks" (P.2). The core message here is that adolescence is a time of tumultuous change and a crucial time in terms of the development of the individual in a holistic sense.

Eccles, Lord and Roeser (1996) suggest that with regard to adolescence, no other developmental period in a person's life is characterised by so many changes. Very fundamental changes occur with regard to pubertal development, social role redefinitions, cognitive development, school transitions and the emergence of sexuality. They conclude that the core developmental tasks that accompany these changes include: achieving a

greater sense of autonomy from parents, confronting issues relating to sexuality, expanding peer relationships and establishing a coherent and healthy personal identity or sense of self.

With a view to establishing a clear and comprehensive framework relating to the concept of adolescence and developmental tasks, I value the simplicity of presentation of the five most significant adolescent developmental tasks as presented by Simmons and Blythe (1987). These are achieving a new self-image, intensifying peer relationships, establishing independence, planning for the future and dealing with conformity versus deviant issues.

In order to achieve these tasks, Simmons and Blythe (1987) feel that adolescents need a safe, secure and intellectually challenging school environment. This environment should provide an appropriate zone of comfort, yet be challenging. It should also provide new opportunities for growth. It is interesting, in light of this research, that

“The environmental changes often associated with transition to junior high school seem especially harmful in that they emphasise competition, social comparison, and ability self assessment at a time of heightened self-focus, they decrease decision making and choice at a time when the desire for control is growing and they disrupt both social networks at a time when adolescents are especially concerned with peer relationships and may be in special need of close adult relationships outside of the home” (Eccles, Lord and Roeser, 1996, in Cicchetti and Toth, p.60).

This view suggests that for some young people, the transition from primary to secondary school can create difficulties from the beginning as an automatic mismatch may arise between the individual and the social contexts. It seems reasonable to assume that if the mismatch or the change is too much, then the young person will feel discomfort with the self and with the new school environment.

This notion of the ‘self’ is important when considering young people and their transition from primary to secondary school. Although the move can be regarded as a move for a group of young people, I believe that each young

person is an individual within that group. The 'sense of self' that may change during the transition process is important and must not go unnoticed

## **2.8: Self-Esteem-Related Research**

One becomes aware, on reading the large corpus of literature pertaining to the 'self', of the difficulties associated with and the confusion arising from the vast array of terms used. The most common and inter-changeable terms that tend to crop up and tend to be used synonymously are 'self-image and 'self esteem', (Dusek & McIntyre, 2003). However, things can get complicated as Butler and Gasson (2005) pointed out that 'self worth', 'self belief', 'self concept', 'self awareness' and 'self regard' as common variations that arise from time to time. Strein (1993) in a review of literature found at least 15 different 'self' terms could be found to be in common usage. Harter (1983) suggested that that the terms used to explore the self are more to do with a simple change of prefix rather than a change in legitimate constructs.

A useful way to consider the 'self' and self related processes is the distinction proposed by Beane and Lipka (1980) who make a distinction between 'self concept' and 'self esteem'. The former typically refers to how people conceive of or describe whereas the latter typically refers to the evaluation of one's self attributes or self descriptions.

Self-esteem is literally defined as how much value individuals place on themselves (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). Self-esteem is the evaluative component of self knowledge with high self-esteem meaning that a person has a highly favourable global evaluation of his/her self. It typically refers to the evaluation of one's self attributes or self descriptions (Beane & Lipka, 1980). Baumeister et al. (2003) posited that self-esteem is a perception rather than a reality. It can refer to whether a person sees themselves as intelligent or attractive but not necessarily say whether that person is actually attractive or intelligent.



In constructing an understanding of the concept of self-esteem, one is faced with complicating issues that arise predominantly around distinctions made regarding the notion of whether self-esteem should be interpreted in terms of a global or a domain specific view of the self (Zanobini & Usai, 2002; Dusek & McIntyre, 2003) and whether self-esteem should be regarded in terms of a baseline measure or a barometric measure of the self (Rosenberg, 1986).

Regarding the construction of the concept of self-esteem for the purpose of this research, I choose to adopt a view of self-esteem as espoused by Demo (1992) who viewed self-esteem as both a structure and a process. This is self-esteem as a dynamic structure that responds to situational stimuli, incorporates new elements, rearranges, adjusts and stabilises upon encountering new stimuli and then goes through further revisions. It may be best understood as a moveable base line that is based on a persistent core of self identity but can be prone to changing levels and configurations of sense of self in accordance with the changing features of the environment and the nature of the social interaction in which one finds oneself.

In addition to difficulties regarding the construction of the concept of self-esteem, challenges also abound when we examine the literature and the claims made relating to the reported effects of self-esteem in terms of favourable outcomes for individuals. It appears to be a widely thought and accepted view that individuals with high self-esteem do better than people who have low self-esteem with high levels of self-esteem seemingly inoculating people from a wide range of problems. Society in general, claim Baumeister et al. (2003), seems to have come to accept that high self-esteem is not only desirable in an individual and indeed collectively in society but is essential as a central psychological source from which all manner of positive behaviours and outcomes spring. Low self-esteem on the other hand is blamed for much societal problems and dysfunctions. This thinking may be reflected in Branden's (1994) claim that he "cannot think of a single psychological problem-from anxiety and depression, to fear of intimacy or success, to spouse battery or child molestation - that is not traceable to the problem of low self esteem" (p.5).

With regard to adolescence, which is the focus of this research, it is of concern to note that Emler (2001) has highlighted a link between low self-esteem and a number of challenges for young people, arguing that young people with low self-esteem tend to treat themselves badly and invite undesirable treatment from others.

In a very thorough meta-analysis of the literature relating to self-esteem and in an attempt to ascertain whether high self esteem is in fact a cause of positive or negative outcomes, Bauneister et al. (2003) concluded the benefits of high self-esteem are far fewer and weaker than proponents of self-esteem have hoped. They suggest that although a person's self-esteem is not a major predictor or cause of almost anything the benefits of high self-esteem can be tentatively categorised into two main themes. First, high self-esteem may operate as person's store of positive feelings that can be a valuable resource and source of resilience under negative conditions. In the midst of and following a period of stress and pressure, it appears that people with high levels of self-esteem have a greater ability to bounce back and cope more effectively, whereas people with low self-esteem tend to lack the vital stock of positive feelings and are more vulnerable as a result. Second, high self-esteem and high levels of initiative appear to be linked. This has implications for how a person makes their way in the world and can help people to reach their potential in a holistic sense.

Although literature relating to the 'self' and more specifically to 'self-esteem' offers varying theories and conceptualisations of what self esteem is, I value the evidence, as presented by Bauneister et al. (2003), that people with positive levels of self-esteem tend to feel happier in themselves. This surely is a primary aim of what we want for all of our young people as they grow and develop. I believe that this is ultimately what educational psychologists strive to achieve as they interact in a professional way with people.

### **2.8.1: Research into Transition and Self-esteem**

Few studies relate specifically to transition and its effects on self-esteem. However, an interesting study carried out by Zanobini and Usai (2002) examined the effects of the move from primary to secondary school on Italian students' domain-specific self-concept and achievement motivation. This study had definite parallels with my research. Familiarity with the Zanobini and Usai study enabled me to clarify my thoughts about my research. I was also enabled to think about ways that I could build on the Zanobini and Usai study. The study also motivated me to consider ways that my research outcomes could add to the body of knowledge relating to transition and the practice of educational psychology.

Zanobini and Usai (2002) adopted a purely quantitative research methodology to answer the questions they were exploring. They used two standardised questionnaires to examine changes in the domain specific self-esteem and achievement motivation of 92 young people, before and after making the transition from primary to secondary school. Domain specific self-esteem relates to different domains that are proposed to make up a person's overall self-esteem such as the physical, academic, social, and emotional domains. Results stated briefly, revealed stability and change in both constructs over time. This was based on T-test analysis. A more in-depth analysis of the results explored various correlations between motivation and many of the domain-specific components of self-esteem. The research and its findings were well presented. However, apart from confirming that domain specific self-esteem can remain stable or can change during transition, I saw no great possibility for change in practice in schools arising from the research. I saw no evidence of triangulation of data sources or explanation of the findings, which were based on the quantified experiences of the study participants. I saw no exploration or generation of ideas that could inform change in practice in schools. This was where a qualitative component or triangulation of methods could have contributed greatly. I intended to address this in my research.

The Zanobini and Usai (2002) research investigated domain specific aspects of self-esteem. My research differed in that it investigated global self-esteem and transition. As well as exploring markers of adjustment in the quantitative Phase 1, the qualitative phases 2 and 3 enabled me to investigate transition as an experience and from a variety of sources. This seemed to be lacking in the study mentioned above.

In a move away from exploring transition and transition effects on self-esteem in a collective manner, as is evident in the above mentioned research, other studies have been carried out on the premise that transition is best researched within the context of exploring individual differences. McDougall and Hymel (1998) suggested two ways of exploring individual variations in students' adjustment to middle school. The traditional approach has been to examine various adjustment outcomes across the transition period whereas a second approach is to directly examine student perceptions of the transition experience and then identify those individual characteristics which differentiate reported positive versus negative experiences, with transition. The question then changes from examining how the group adjusts to what differentiates those who cope well in transition from those who do not.

Cognisant of this, McDougall and Hymel (1998) approached their research into transition in a way that allowed them to investigate individual experiences of the transition process. This was valuable in the manner in which it facilitated the analysis of emerging patterns and themes but also allowed researchers to look at exceptions. McDougall and Hymel (1998) adopted a methodology that was based firmly on their belief that other studies, although exploring young peoples' experiences, had not accessed the voice of the consumer by directly asking young people about their experience of transition. Using a short term longitudinal design, their study adopted what initially appeared to be a very similar mixed methods research design to that of my research. Prior to the move to secondary school, the researchers collected what they referred to as, adjustment information in a quantitative way using standardised questionnaires (T1). Following the transition, these tests were re-administered with a view to exploring quantitative changes (T2). However,

between T1 and T2, they provided young people with an opportunity to directly reflect on the experience of having to make the transition to secondary school. Thus, their study was addressing the question of whether particular individual characteristics placed students at greater risk for a stressful transition experience and whether young people attitude to impending transition predicted or affected their transition outcomes.

My initial reaction to this research was positive in the manner in which I felt that the qualitative element would give a clear insight into the voice of the young participants. However, reporting and discussion of the results was very statistical and I felt that much if not all of the voice was lost in the reporting of numbers. Although the research adopted a mixed methods study design, the paradigm emphasis was predominantly quantitative in nature. This left me feeling that much of the young peoples' transition stories were lost. I felt that the research added very little to an understanding of the primary research finding that indicated that for the majority of young people, the transition was neither difficult nor stressful. This is an aspect of transition that I hoped to address in my research.

Never the less, one very important issue that McDougall and Hymel's (1998) research highlighted for me was a realisation that transition occurs within a period of other substantial changes within a teenager's life. Many of these changes, warned McDougall and Hymel (1998), may influence variations in adjustment outcomes or changes in self-esteem changes. In terms of my research this difficulty could be overcome, according to McDougall and Hymel (1998) by asking young people directly about their experiences of the transition. This awareness of the need to and possibility of isolating variables through the use of direct and specific questioning was certainly a great help for me when I was designing my research. It also informed the type of questions that I would finally include in both the young people semi-structured interviews and teacher focus groups.

On the whole, I feel that much of the research into transition is predominantly researched and reported in a manner which highlights a quantitative approach

to data collection. This is mainly in response to the nature of the questions being asked, many of which strive to explore correlations and establish observable patterns of behaviour within the data and offer explanations with the aid of numbers. This positivist or empirical approach does yield valuable information but for me the stories that contextualise the data are equally as important and more so if positive change that is based on the need and experiences of all people concerned is to be realised.

Thus far, we have examined research that investigates various aspects of the primary to secondary school transition journey. In summarising the research that I have outlined, I suggest that little research has taken place in the Irish context. Research that has taken place in Ireland has examined the process in urban settings. Research that has taken place internationally has tended to emphasise the negative aspects of transition. The main approach to investigation has been predominantly quantitative and many studies have investigated transition in collective terms and in a way that does not access the stories that people have to tell about their experiences. Much of the research studies also tend to offer little in terms of providing suggestions for changes that can be made to ensure more favourable outcomes for all during the transition from primary to secondary school. In an effort to investigate transition in rural Ireland and make recommendations for change in transition practices, I undertook the research outlined here. However, prior to outlining this research, I believe it is important that I outline some of the theoretical frameworks that informed my thinking and can inform thinking in general around the transition from primary to secondary school transition process.

## **2.9: Conceptual Frameworks to Guide Thinking About School Transition**

Thus far, various elements of transition and the transition process have been outlined. Young people do experience transition in different ways and schools can and do support young people in different ways. Existing research, I believe, should inform us and provide us with a strong evidence base that informs us on the most effective ways to support young people. However, if we are to support young people around transition, we have to have a wider

understanding of transition and we have to be able to draw on some conceptual frameworks that guide our thinking and understanding of the phenomenon that we are attempting to manage. Therefore, I now present four broad conceptual frameworks that I believe can be useful in developing our understanding of transition and in highlighting the important role that people and systems have to play in managing transitions for all young people and schools.

### **2.9.1: Stage-environment Fit**

“The developmental stage, from early to late adolescence, is unique in its multitude of concurrent changes that exist across various contexts” (Gutman & Eccles, 2007, p.522). However, when the social environment does not change to meet the evolving adolescent’s evolving needs a developmental mismatch may occur (Chu & Powers, 1995). This mismatch for instance may be evident in the case of a family with a young person. At times, the family unit may go through severe periods of stress when issues of the young person’s evolving need for greater autonomy, a greater sense of control and power in decision making are being renegotiated. (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988; Buchanan, Eccles, & Becker, 1992).

Thus, optimal development and the enablement and empowerment of a young person to reach his/her potential, in a holistic sense, occurs when an individual interacts with a social environment that is responsive and adaptive to his/her changing needs. It is interesting to note that as adolescents begin to find new ways of exercising their need for greater autonomy, decision making, feeling more in control, exploring new relationships, they enter a school system that discourages such behaviour. This can be the case as secondary schools traditionally place them in a social environment that is characterised by teacher control and discipline, and fewer opportunities for student decision making, choice and self-management (Brophy & Everston, 1976). Is it not surprising then that some adolescents face many difficulties during the transition from primary to secondary school?

From a stage-environment fit perspective, Eccles, Midgley, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan, & Iver (1993) proposed that the most favourable growth will occur when the trajectories of early adolescence and the trajectories of environmental changes across the school years are in synchrony. In the case of the transition from primary school to secondary school, this requires that the social environments are responsive, facilitative and developmentally appropriate as young people move in, move through and move out of the transition. Adolescents, whose school environments respond positively to their changing needs, are more likely to make a smoother transition than adolescents whose schools respond in developmentally regressive ways.

In examining literature relating to life changes and transitions, much evidence is apparent of the application of the stage-environment fit and mismatch models to the investigation of qualitative and quantitative outcome changes at various stages throughout peoples' lives. These include decision making (Midgley & Feldlaufer, 1987,) motivation and self confidence (Eccles, Lord, Roeser, Barber, & Hernandez Jozefowicz, 1997), achievement (Whitley, Lupart, & Beran, 2007), school and family experience (Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan, & Mac Iver, 1993). However, little research has taken place which examines young peoples' holistic development in a manner that examines the interface between a young person's developmental changes and appropriate environmental changes or responses in the school. Eccles and Roeser (2009) argue that if we are to understand how schools influence development, we need to understand change at both the individual and the institutional level.

I value the opportunity that 'stage-environment fit theory' provides in terms of promoting and facilitating a greater understanding of the primary to secondary school transition and highlighting the vital link between these two developmental trajectories. The link that it makes between the individual and the social context in which a young person finds themselves challenges schools to become agents of change at a systemic level. It no longer allows a view of young people as passive agents who need to fit neatly into a static and standard environment. Rather it views transition as a process that allows



and calls for change and adaptation at all levels. It calls for a review of possible environmental barriers to holistic development as opposed to attributing emerging difficulties to within child difficulties or deficits. In the manner in which Vygotsky applied the notion of a zone of proximal development to present a way of describing and understanding the role an adult plays in scaffolding development in a child, schools in terms of a stage-environment fit model have a vital role to play in making changes that respond appropriately and developmentally to the changing needs of adolescents.

### **2.9.2: Arenas of Comfort**

When exploring life changes and life transitions, Simmons and Blythe (1987) formulated the concept of the 'Arena of Comfort' as one way of understanding the nature of life experiences. In relation to life changes and life transitions, if a change happens too quickly or occurs too early in terms of developmental readiness, or occurs in the midst of other changes, then a person may experience extreme discomfort (Simmons, 2001). Simmons and Blythe (1987) hypothesised that individuals will cope better if there is some arena of comfort in their lives. In essence, this means that if comfort exists in some areas of a person's life arenas (e.g. environments, relationships, and self-esteem) then discomfort in another can be tolerated to a greater degree. An arena of comfort in one's life will provide the individual, who is living through a stressful period, with an alternative zone of comfort into which they can escape, become relaxed, re-energised and re-invigorated. The arena of comfort therefore provides a safe haven (Call & Mortimer, 2001).

In terms of positive development and learning for life, it is important to note Simmon's and Blythe's (1997) assertion that all change demands some levels of discomfort if a person is to develop appropriate coping skills that will make them more resilient in the face of future potentially stressful life scenarios.

Although this concept of the arena of comfort is generally applied to life changes, it can also, I believe, be meaningfully applied to the primary to

secondary school transitions. It can be applied on two levels. Level 1 or the macro level being the school transition as a significant change taking place in the context of a young person's evolving life and Level 2 or the micro level being the transition viewed as a unique event in itself. Thus, with regard to Level 1, arenas of comfort may refer to levels of comfort outside the school setting whereas Level 2 arenas of comfort may refer to arenas of comfort more immediate to the school experience. These are of greater concern in the context of this research.

### **2.9.3: Transition and Inclusion**

In examining the experiences of children entering the Scottish primary school system for the first time, Stephen and Cope (2003) explored transition (its opportunities and risks) in terms of two different models of inclusion. The first model was the individual or medical model while the second model was the social model. They concluded by relating their findings to each of these models in turn.

Their exploratory qualitative study, which followed 27 children through their first year in primary school, was designed to contribute to an understanding of the experiences of children who make the transition to primary school. The research was valuable in the way in which it provided an opportunity for a more longitudinal investigation of the early school transition process. The views of parents and teachers were also gathered throughout the transition process.

In general terms, their findings suggested that responding to the diversity of pupils by adapting to accommodate them is not the way in which the primary school construed the process. Transition was regarded as a one-way process throughout which young people learned about and became accustomed to the kind of educational provision on offer. This carried the risk that those who were not ready or able to fit into the box being offered were at risk of being at odds with the system.

Having arrived at these conclusions, Stephen and Cope (2003) then, for the purpose of exploring alternative ways of constructing the process of transition, looked at the process through the 'lens of inclusion'. They considered the medical model which locates any difficulty in the young person and then the social model which explains difficulty in terms of the environment.

In terms of these alternative views of transition, Stephen and Cope (2003) concluded that the teachers who participated in their research were adopting a medical model approach to the transition process. Evidence of this was found in the way in which they attributed any difficulties that a young people were experiencing around transition to features within the young person such as personality, behaviour, expectations or preferences. They saw the root of any problem as residing in the young person and therefore saw any change or adaptation that had to take place as also residing in the young person. In this way, which is not inclusive of all young people, the school adopted an external locus of control when viewing change, and remained unchanging and unchanged. In this way, young people who are not seen to fit in, continue to not fit in and ultimately face the risk of being excluded rather than included.

The alternative to this is a social model of inclusion. I see this model, when generalised to all schools, as identifying the root of a difficulty as possibly resulting from a schools failure to provide appropriate support and failure to adapt to meet the needs of individual young people. With a view to inclusion of all young people and ensuring a more favourable outcome for all young people, adopting a social model to the transition process challenges schools to become more proactive in their approach to supporting young people and to become more vigilant and solution focused in exploring potential institutional barriers to inclusion during the transition journey. In this way, young people, who are not reaching their potential or are facing challenges during transition, are not blamed or simply regarded as problematic or lost cases. Young people regarded as problems run a high risk of becoming marginalised and excluded. Schools who regard children as problems become stagnant and ineffective as agents of positive change and fail in their duty to meet the needs of all young people.

#### **2.9.4: Mindset Theory**

Equipped with a lens, through which I could now begin to gain a more wholesome and meaningful understanding of alternative ways of conceptualising transition, I began to make links with other conceptual frameworks and began to expand my thinking around transition. What emerged along the thinking journey was a link between the medical and social views of transition and the theory of mindset as formulated by Carol S. Dweck (2006).

Dweck (2006), in an effort to understand how people cope with and react to challenges and difficulties, examined individual differences in the ways that a person sees themselves. Dweck (2006) postulated that the way in which a person sees themselves profoundly affects the way they lead their life.

With regard to the view that one holds of themselves and the way in which they operate in the world, Dweck (2006) believes that a person can be operating within one of two mindsets, these being a 'fixed' or a 'growth' mindset. A fixed mindset means that a person believes that qualities and realities are set in stone and there is little room for change. Within this passive mindset, things are the way they are and a person feels that they simply have to get on with it. This, suggests Dweck (2006), is the path to stagnation. Nothing can be done so why bother. However, within the growth mindset, positive change can be cultivated and nurtured through effort. People believe they can grow through application and experience. People actively interact with their environments, have control in it and can make changes. Change can be brought about so let's try. This, suggests Dweck (2006), is the path to opportunity and success.

I believe that a school's approach to supporting young people can be active or passive, reactive or proactive, motivating or draining, positive or negative, dynamic or stagnated, depending on the nature of its whole school mindset. A growth mindset school, much in the same way as a school that holds a social view of transition, promotes action, facilitates growth and positive change. It

strives for positive supports for every young person. It rises to challenges in solution focused ways and actively seeks out answers to difficult questions and difficult situations. It promotes a nurturing and inclusive environment for young people, especially at a crucial time like transition. A fixed mindset school, much in the same way as a school that holds a medical view of transition, becomes stagnated, unsupportive, unyielding and unresponsive. These schools remain as they are. They may serve the needs of a young person who is seen to be 'fitting in'. However, the young person who is experiencing difficulty may be seen as a threat to the status quo and a problem to be eradicated.

The implications of the theory of mindset is clear in terms of how schools manage the transition from primary to secondary school and ultimately how young people experience it. It is encouraging to remember that "you can change your mindset".

## **2.10: Putting it All Together: An Ecological Systems Theory of Transition**

In terms of an overarching framework for understanding the transition from primary school to secondary school and providing a framework in which to embed all we have explored thus far, I consider Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to offer a very comprehensive and holistic way of explaining the process. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, when applied to the transition process, explains the process in terms of the transition being either helped or hindered by the many complex and complicated relationships that exist between the young person and his/her family, peer group, school, community, and culture.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) conceptualised a young person's social environment to be made up of four inter-related and inter-connected systems. The *microsystem* is the setting in which a young person lives and is made up of the activities, roles and relationships directly experienced by a young person in the daily lives. The family and school are places where a young person interacts with others. The *mesosystem* describes the relationship that exists

between two or more of a young person's microsystems, an example being the relationship that a school has with the family or how teachers see families and their role in their child's education. The *ecosystem* is a setting in which a young person does not interact or experience. However, the young person's experience can be affected by that setting or can have and affects on that setting. Finally, the *macrosystem* describes the cultural and sub-culture in which a young person lives.

More recently, the role of a person's biology has been acknowledged as having an important role to play in a person's development. Therefore, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model is now sometimes referred to as the Bio-ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). The model continues to offer a framework for understanding the reality that in any young person's life, the different layers of the ecological context may effect changes in all other levels. A major implication of this notion of 'dynamic connectedness', when applied to the transition process, is that young people are active agents in their own development or transition process. However, how their transition journey progresses is influenced by a whole range of other factors in their social environments. The notion of dynamic connectedness calls on us to look at transition in a holistic way and calls on us to manage transition in a way that moves beyond the immediate setting of the school. It recognises the need for the transition from primary school to secondary school to be viewed as a dynamic and complicated process that involves many possible social changes and is characterised by relationships that are constantly moving and shifting as the process unfolds. At the centre of this process is the young person. However, as we go about managing transitions in the future, we will only be successful in our efforts, if we acknowledge the significant influence the home, school, community and culture play in the whole transition process.

## **2.11: Towards a New Understanding of Transition in Ireland**

The main aim of my research was to investigate the primary to secondary school transition in Ireland. Although it followed and built on previous research in this area, this research intended to offer something new in terms of the

approach and additional understanding of the transition journey. It adopted a predominantly qualitative, mixed methods approach to investigating transition from the perspective of young people **and** their teachers. It explored both the negative and positive aspects of the transition journey. It focused on investigating transition in rural Ireland and placed an emphasis on gathering and reporting the voices of the people, at both a collective and individual level, who experienced the transition from primary to secondary school. It also moved beyond mere reporting and provided a novel framework for transition with the aim of enabling people to better understand transition and manage it. This research strived to ensure more favourable outcomes for everyone connected with the transition journey from primary to secondary school in Ireland.

## **2.12: Research Questions Revisited**

This research aimed to investigate the transition experiences of a group of young people and some of their primary and secondary school teachers. To this end, seven research questions were developed. In considering the research questions, it is important to consider my epistemological stance and the theoretical underpinnings of my research. These will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

A recap of the research questions is as follows:

1. Do young people's experiences of the transition from primary to secondary school have a positive or negative effect on their self-esteem, as measured by the self rating self-esteem measure?
2. What do young people tell us about their experience of the primary to secondary school transition journey?
3. What factors, during the transition journey, do some young people attribute to a decrease in their self-esteem levels?
4. What factors, during the transition journey, do some young people attribute to an increase in their self-esteem levels?

5. What do primary school teachers tell us about their experiences of working with young people who make the transition from primary to secondary school?
6. What do secondary school teachers tell us about their experiences of working with young people who make the transition from primary to secondary school?
7. How can we manage the primary to secondary school transition in a way that ensures favourable outcomes for all?

### **2.13: Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, the broad theoretical foundations on which this research is built have been outlined. It is evident that the transition from primary to secondary school is regarded as an important time for young people. It is one journey that can occur in the midst of several other journeys and it is a journey that can go well and not so well. It is evident that many young people can benefit from support around the transition journey and it is vital that schools take their support role seriously. To do so, calls on schools and teachers to develop their own understanding of transition as a process that needs to be planned for and managed. An awareness of various alternative ways of thinking about young people and transition will enable people to become more successful in their endeavours to support all young people as they make the transition from primary to secondary school.



# Chapter 3: Methodology

## 3.1: Overview of Chapter

This chapter outlines the methodological approaches adopted in this research. This chapter will begin with an outline of the research design (3.2). This will be followed by an outline of some of the epistemological considerations that informed the research design (3.3). The research context will be outlined (3.4) and this will be followed by a detailed exploration of the phases of the research (3.5). An outline of thematic analysis will be offered (3.6). This will be followed by an outline of the research principles that underpinned the research process (3.7). This chapter concludes with a chapter summary. (3.8).

## 3.2: Research Design-An Overview

This research adopted a predominantly qualitative, mixed-methods approach, to explore aspects of the transition from primary to secondary school in an Irish context. A visual illustration (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011) of the Sequential Explanatory Design (quant → Qual) research process is as follows:

Table 1: An Overview of the Sequential Explanatory Design.

<b><u>Phase</u></b>	<b><u>Procedure</u></b>	<b><u>Product</u></b>
Quantitative Data Collection	Pre-transition and post-transition questionnaire (N=84)	Numeric data
Quantitative Data Analysis	SPSS T-Test.	Identification of 3 groups In relations to changes in self-esteem levels
QUALITATIVE Data Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transition Questionnaire (N=87)</li> <li>• Semi structured interviews (N=14)</li> <li>• Semi-structured interviews with primary school teachers (N=8)</li> <li>• Focus groups with secondary school teachers (N=7)</li> </ul>	Text data: interview transcripts
QUALITATIVE Data Analysis	Thematic analysis	Codes and themes
Integration of the Quantitative and QUALITATIVE Results	Interpretation and explanation of the quantitative and qualitative results	Discussion Implications Future research.

Research, and in particular the combining of research methods, is never straight forward, remarks Patton (1999). This is because certain kinds of questions lend themselves to qualitative methods while other types of questions lend themselves to quantitative approaches.

As a researcher who values both methodologies, but has a personal leaning towards qualitative research, I find it unhelpful to engage in the qualitative versus quantitative debate. I welcome Patton's (1999) assertion that "the important challenge is to match appropriately the methods to empirical questions and issues and not to universally put forward any single methodological approach for all problems" (p.1189).

I feel, that although qualitative and quantitative research differ in terms of ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodology and language of research, qualitative research and quantitative methodologies can be productively used together in a bimodal fashion, or mixed methods design which allows each to add their own strength and flavour to the research process. Indeed building on their fundamental principle of mixed research, Johnson and Turner (2003) urge researchers to collect multiple data, using different strategies, approaches and methods in such a manner that the resulting mixture or combination is likely to result in complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses.

Mixing both methods to explore the transition process, I felt would enhance the quality and rigour of the information I would achieve. This triangulation of methods would strengthen the reliability of my findings and would also provide an opportunity to explore any conflicts that could arise between data gathered in each method.

The research, which was characterised by three research phases, adopted a predominantly qualitative, mixed methods approach or more specifically a Sequential Explanatory Design (Creswell, 2003). This research process enabled me to use the qualitative data to assist in explaining and interpreting the findings of the quantitative data. The quantitative process explored

whether the transition between primary and secondary school has an effect on individual young peoples' self esteem (Phase 1). I then went on to explore what students (Phase 2) and teachers (Phase 3) say about transition. Interacting with people and listening to their voices was undertaken with a view to finding out what goes on during the lived reality of the primary to secondary school transition journey. The findings could then be woven into a framework for best practice around managing school transition for the future.

Although, I believed that the sequential explanatory design would enable me to answer my research questions I was aware of the possible limitations (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011) of this method. The phased approach required considerable time to implement and I had to recognise this and allow for this time in my research plan.

### **3.3: Epistemological Frameworks Underpinning this Research and Choice of the Research Design**

Any exploration of research requires one to think about the nature of knowledge itself. A researcher's choice of research method informs their approach to their research question and the answers that they will arrive at. Willig (2007) suggests that researchers need to be able to identify their goal and have a clear rationale for the choices they have made. In an effort to attain their goal, researchers also need clarity around their objectives and need to have an understanding of the things it is possible for them to find out. This requires researchers to clarify their epistemological stance when undertaking research.

Epistemology, Krauss (2005) explains, poses the following questions: What is the relationship between the knower and the known? How do we know what we know? What counts as knowledge? Trochim (2000) tells us that epistemology, in simple terms, is the philosophy of knowledge or how we come to know. Krauss (2005) believes that epistemology is closely linked to ontology and methodology. Ontology addresses the philosophy of reality.

Epistemology involves exploration of how we come to know that reality while methodology identifies the particular practices used to attain knowledge of it.

### **3.3.1: Epistemological Position-Professional Practice**

As my employing service has close links to the Department of Education and Science, much of my role entails working in a manner that fits very much into a positivist or technical-rationalist approach to working with people. On the ground, this means a lot of individual casework, usually involving the administration of a standardised cognitive assessment instrument. Rather than feeling that this activity is being imposed upon me, I do, to a certain extent, value the quantitative information that is gleaned from this quantitative approach. However, rather than view the information/data in isolation, I prefer to incorporate it into a much bigger picture. This is where the social constructionist or interpretative basis to my practice becomes realised. Therefore, rather than being guided by one epistemological basis of practice, my daily professional interactions with service users sees me making decisions that are sometimes technical-rationalist in approach, sometimes social constructionist and sometimes both. Based on this, my work methodologies or practices are sometimes qualitative in nature, sometimes quantitative and sometimes employ both stances.

### **3.3.2: Epistemological Position- Researcher Practice**

As is the case in my pragmatic approach to professional practice, my research practice also drew on a bimodal research methodology which embraced the value of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The quantitative component attempted to provide an answer to the first research question which was whether the transition from primary to secondary school has an effect on young peoples' self-esteem as measured by the rating on a standardised self-esteem measure.

The use of the self-esteem measure invited students to respond to various statements, with the aid of a Likert scale. This method arose from a positivist

belief or epistemological belief that a young person's self-esteem can be quantified at a given time through the use of a standardised questionnaire that yields a global score. With a view that self-esteem is not static, I believe that a person's responses to that same questionnaire on two different occasions can highlight quantitative changes in their self-esteem levels. This research phase, which was based on a technical-rationalist view of the world, was independent of me as researcher. Knowledge about participant's self-esteem was discovered and verified through direct observations or measurements of phenomena. The purpose of the quantitative stage was that the data confirmed whether the transition had a positive or negative effect on their self-esteem. The resulting data facilitated the categorisation of the students into two groups; those who experience transition as negative and those who experience it as positive.

Building on the information yielded through the analysis of the quantitative data, the qualitative component of the research was undertaken. This phase was useful as Morse (2006) feels that qualitative research is better able to address the confusing and chaotic problems that are too difficult to tackle using quantitative approaches. This research phase explored the remaining research questions.

A qualitative questionnaire, individual interviews with young people and teachers and focus groups with teachers were the methods I choose as I regarded them as the appropriate means of providing me with a way to explore and gain an insight into the young people and teachers' experiences, thoughts and feelings around transition. These methods enabled me to build a rich picture of transition and provided a means of finding out some possible reasons for individual differences and reasons for any possible changes that did occur in young peoples' self esteem levels. These methods also allowed me to bring the teachers' and students' voices together and enabled me to think of possible solutions that could lead to more favourable outcomes for all students and schools in the future. I believed that without gaining an insight into the real difficulties that young people and teachers experience around transition, I could not arrive at meaningful and realistic solutions that could

directly intervene at a level that addressed the real needs of individuals, as voiced by them directly.

Although this research adopted a mixed methods design, the research was predominantly concerned with exploring meaning within a context. Therefore, I approached the research questions from a predominantly social constructionist epistemology. I thought it appropriate that I should adopt a predominantly qualitative approach to data gathering (methodology) with the specific research techniques (method) being characterised by a qualitative questionnaire, interviews and focus groups. Rather than embracing an overriding positivist position and believing that it would be possible for me “to describe what is out there and get it right” (Willig, 2007, p.3) I believed that the reality around transition for young people and their teachers was socially constructed through individual or collective definitions of the situation. The primary research aim was to investigate how individual young people and teachers make sense of the transition experience and to try to understand what it is like to experience the transition process. Thus, with this standpoint, I felt that it would be possible for me to listen to peoples’ voices, interpret what they were saying, and present their meaning in a manner which could bring about meaningful and relevant change in the future.

### **3.4: The Research Context**

As mentioned earlier, this research took place in a geographical context that I consider to be very unique. With this context, the secondary school in question was preparing for a total of 97 young people to make the transition from 13 feeder primary schools in September 2008. This new cohort of incoming First Years would be comprised of 46 boys and 51 girls aged between 12 and 13. In September the number of young people attending the secondary school would be 505.

With regard to established transition practices that were evident within the context of this research setting, I had an overall sense that the transition from primary to secondary school, for the young people who took part in this

research, would just happen as it had happened every year to date. I had no sense or evidence that it was being planned for or managed to any great degree in any of the feeder primary schools or the host secondary school. It appeared to be regarded as an annual isolated event which was left to unfold as it did each year.

In terms of additional and specific transition arrangements, a top down arrangement was evident. This consisted primarily of a teacher from the secondary school visiting each of the primary school in early Spring. The purpose of this informal visit was to build a picture of the potential number of young people transferring to the secondary school, with an emphasis on the passing on of information regarding any pre-existing significant or documented difficulties that any young person might have. Significant focus at this time was placed on the sharing of existing psychological/educational reports. The administrative bridge was important here.

For one week in late Spring, all incoming young people visit the secondary school for half a day. This visit is an opportunity for the various feeder groups to become familiar with the school and its layout. Young people then begin their new school life the following September.

### **3.5: The Three Research Phases**

Seeing the value in having numbers to describe phenomena but also valuing the stories that people tell about their experiences and listening to the way they talk about their personal experiences, I set about designing a study that adopted a mixed methods approach to building up a rich picture around the transition experiences of real people. This research was characterised by three distinct research phases, these being Phase 1, Phase 2 and Phase 3. The following table illustrates the research phases.

Table 2: Outline of Research Phases and Data Collection Process.

Research Question	How Answered		
	Analysis of pre and post transition SDQ scores	Questionnaire and Semi-structured interviews (SSI) with young people	SSI with primary school staff and focus groups with secondary school staff.
<p><b>PHASE 1 (Quantitative)</b></p> <p>Do young people's experiences of transition from primary to secondary school have a positive or negative effect on their self-esteem as measured by the self rating self-esteem measure?</p>	✓		
<p><b>PHASE2 (Qualitative)</b></p> <p>What do young people tell us about their experience of the primary to secondary school transition journey?</p>		✓  Questionnaire	
<p>What factors during the transition journey do some young people attribute to a rise in their self-esteem levels?</p>		✓  SSI	
<p>What factors during the transition journey do some young people attribute to a fall in their self-esteem levels?</p>		✓  SSI	
<p><b>PHASE 3 (Qualitative)</b></p> <p>What do primary school teachers tell us about their experiences of working with young people who make the transition from primary to secondary school?</p>			✓  SSI
<p>What do secondary school teachers tell us about their experiences of working with young people who make the transition from primary to secondary school?</p>			✓  Focus Group
<p>How can manage the primary to secondary school transition in a way that ensures favourable outcomes for all.</p>		✓	✓

\* SSI=Semi-structured Interview

### 3.5.1: Initial preparation

Having secured university approval for the proposed research to proceed and subsequent ethical approval, initial contact was made in writing with the 13 primary and the single secondary perspective participating schools and the parents/guardians of the perspective 97 youth participants ( Appendix 1 and 2). At the end of this initial planning process, all of the 14 schools, 13 primary and 1 secondary, decided to participate in the research and parental consent was given for all of the 97 young people to participate. With this aspect of



research participation secured the research process was prepared for and undertaken as follows.

### **3.5.2: Phase 1: An Overview**

Phase 1, which was comprised of Part A and Part B, constituted the quantitative stage of the research. A statistical comparison of young peoples' pre-transition and post transition responses to a standardised self-esteem questionnaire was to provide an answer to Research Question 1 which was : Do young people's experiences of the transition from primary to secondary school have a positive or negative effect on their self-esteem as measured by the self rating self-esteem measure? An overview of Part A and Part B of Phase 1 now follows.

#### **Phase 1- Part A**

In June 2008, Phase 1A of the research took place. With a view to determining whether the experience of the transition from primary to secondary school had a positive or negative effect on their self-esteem, as measured by the self rating self-esteem measure, 89 young people of the possible 97, who were in their final month in primary school and about to make the transition to secondary in the following September, were through the use of convenience sampling, invited to respond to a standardised questionnaire called the Self-Description Questionnaire-11 (SDQ-11, March, 1990). (See Appendix 3).

The SDQ-11 is designed to measure multiple dimensions of self-concept for adolescents. Viewing self-concept as multi-dimensional in nature, the SDQ-11 measures seven non-academic areas (i.e. Physical Ability, Physical Appearance, Same Sex Relations, Opposite Sex Relations, Parent Relations, Emotional Stability and Honesty/Trustworthiness), three academic areas (i.e. Reading, Mathematics and School in general) and a global perception of self. The SDQ-11 was chosen because extensive psychometric research has supported its reliability and validity (Gilman, Laughlin & Scott-Huebner, 1999).

The SDQ-11 to be the most validated self-concept measure available for use with adolescent children.

### **Phase 1- Part A: Data Gathering Procedure.**

The data was gathered in each of the 13 primary school settings in the month of June, just before the participants finished their primary school education. Prior to meeting with the young people, each staff body in all of the 13 primary schools were briefed on the nature and purpose of the proposed research. A preliminary verbal invitation to consider becoming a teacher participant was issued at that time with a commitment that the researcher would forward a written reminder letter in the Autumn.

Each of the primary school standardised questionnaire completion sessions followed the same format and took roughly one hour to complete from beginning to end. A typical session was undertaken solely by the present researcher but in the presence of another staff member who was invited to take a passive role in the classroom. Each session began with an outline discussion of the purpose of the questionnaire and the proposed research. This was followed by an invitation that allowed every young person to decide for themselves whether they wanted to participate in the research. This invitation was given with a clear understanding that each young person was free to make a decision to participate or not. The young people were invited to consent to the research in the form of a consent form (Appendix 4).

Once I was comfortable to proceed, each individual student received a copy of the questionnaire. The first five questionnaire items were then explored so that the young people were comfortable, confident and ready to complete the whole questionnaire. Prior to completing the questionnaire, it was made clear to the students that they should feel free, at any time, to silently raise their hand should any issue arise for them while they completed the questionnaire. It was made clear that when someone raised their hand, that young person's need would be addressed at an individual level. This arrangement facilitated a more successful completion of the questionnaire by young people, who

unknown to me, experienced additional learning needs and who might otherwise have struggled with the content of the questionnaire. Following the completion of the questionnaire, each questionnaire was collected by myself. Any follow up questions raised by young people were explored at a group level prior to the group being thanked for their time and their much valued participation in the research. After each session, the completed questionnaires were appropriately labelled and stored in a way that ensured confidentiality and safety of access to me (as researcher) only.

### **Phase 1- Part B**

Phase 1B took place in the secondary school setting in November 2008. Having made the transition to secondary school, the young people were now in one of 4 new class groupings, each having been randomly assigned, according to school policy. Phase 1B, again through the use of a convenience sampling method, entailed every young person, who was available on the day, being invited to once again complete the SDQ-11. Parents were sent a reminder letter prior to the researcher meeting with the young people again. (Appendix 5). All of the young people decided to participate again.

### **Phase 1- Part B: Data Gathering Procedure**

The procedure adopted in this phase mirrored the initial procedure as undertaken in Phase 1A.

At this point, having successfully collected the pre-transition and post transition data, all the raw data was filed and securely stored awaiting analysis. Between Phase 1 Part A and Phase 1 Part B, a total of 84 young people had completed the questionnaire on both occasions.

### **Phase 1: Data Analysis**

In January 2009, I set up a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) file and imputed all raw data. Through the application of a Paired

Samples T-test, a comparison of each young person's pre-transition and post-transition measures indicated whether a significant change had occurred in his/her global self-esteem levels following the transition to secondary school. For the purpose of this analysis, the categorical independent variable was time (T1 and T2) and the continuous dependent variable was a young person's global self level score measured on the two different occasions. The comparative analysis facilitated the categorisation of students into those who made a positive adjustment and those who made a negative adjustment.

### **3.5.3: Phase 2: An Overview**

This phase of the research, which was a qualitative exploration of what the young people had to say about their transition experiences, was conducted in two parts, these being Phase 2 Part A and Part B. The purpose of Phase 2 was two fold. Phase 2 Part A was concerned with gaining an insight, through the use of the researcher generated, user friendly, opened ended-format questionnaire, of every individual young person's personal experience of the transition process that they had experienced and continued to experience. Phase 2 Part B was concerned with focusing, through purposeful selection, more specifically on listening to the voices of young people who were identified as having experienced the transition as either positive or negative.

#### **Development of the Questionnaire in Phase 2 - Part A.**

The purpose of the questionnaire, which was designed for the purposes of this research, was to elicit every young person's feeling about the transition, in a simple and clear manner. This means of data collection was chosen because it is economical to use, less invasive than other qualitative methods and quicker to complete for the large group of young participants (Marks, 2004). A number of factors were taken into account and contributed to the emergence of the final questionnaire that was designed and used specifically in this study.

Firstly, the questionnaire evolved in response to the vast amount of background reading into transition that was undertaken. Secondly, the style and content of the questionnaire reflected a commitment to develop a clear and simple system that would tap into young peoples' feelings and allow access to information that would enable me to find the answers to the research questions. Finally, the questionnaire was developed with a view to eliciting information that would help fill the gap in relation to research exploring elements of the transition process for young people in a rural Irish context.

Following a pilot that was undertaken in a non-participating school, a number of small changes were made, the most important being the decision to omit the invitation to the young people to record their name when completing the questionnaire. This decision was based on feedback which indicated that young people felt less likely to be honest in their questionnaire responses when there was a possibility that they could be easily identified at a later stage. Following the implementation of the suggestions from the pilot and final editorial changes, the resulting survey questionnaire, which was comprised of a series of open-ended questions and a single scaling question, was ready for use. (Appendix 6).

## **Phase 2 - Part A: Procedure**

In January 2009, all of the young people available on the day, 45 males and 42 females, through the use of a convenience sampling method were once again invited to participate in the next phase of the research. This invitation was given after a reminder letter was sent to all parents (Appendix 7). Each of the four First Year classes was addressed individually. In each case, the young people were once again briefed on the overall research plan. The research findings to date were explored with the young people and the young peoples' choice in deciding whether to carry on in the research plan or not were explored. A questions and answer time was useful in allowing the researcher to provide the young people with any additional information they felt they needed. All of the young people decided to complete the proposed

questionnaire and continue with the research process. A similar procedure to questionnaire completion was followed as outlined earlier in Phase 1.

## **Phase 2 - Part A: Analytic Procedure**

The questionnaire that the young people completed was structured to invite the young people to explore areas relating to their transition experience.

As the exploratory questionnaire was designed to elicit as much information as possible, I made the decision to analyse and organise the data by means of a content analysis (Marks, 2004). This enabled me to observe what the young people were saying in terms of frequency. I then categorised the most common pieces of information into main overarching themes or statements that captured what the young people were saying about the transition they experienced. This approach was undertaken with a view to systematically organising the data and presenting it in a way that captured the richness of the data set. A summary of the questionnaire items is as follows:

Figure 2: Outline of Transition Questionnaire.

1. Can you think of a word that best describes how the transition from primary to secondary school was for you?
2. I used this word because...
3. What would you say was the hardest thing about the transition and why?
4. Can you think of three things that you really missed about primary school?
5. Can you remember three things that you found really different about secondary school when you first started?
6. What do you feel are the biggest changes between primary and secondary school?
7. Can you think of some things about primary school that you would like to see in secondary school?
8. Can you think of three things that the primary school could have done (while you were in primary school) to better prepare you for the transition?
9. Can you think of three things that the secondary school could have done (while you were in primary school) to better prepare you for the transition?
10. Can you think of three things the secondary school could have done after you started in secondary school that could have made it easier for you?
11. Can you think of the things (if any) that worry you about life in your new secondary school?
12. Can you think of things that the school could do now to support you better?
13. If you were going through it again, what might you do differently?
14. What advice would you give to people who are in Sixth Class now?
15. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate how successful the transition was for you?
16. How could be brought up to 10 by...

## **Phase 2 - Part B**

### **Selection of 2B participants**

The nature of the completed Self Description Questionnaires allowed me, through the use of a purposeful sampling strategy, to identify all of the young people who had reported either an increase (n=10) or a decrease (n=4) in their transition self esteem levels. With this knowledge, I then invited all of these young people to take part in a follow up semi-structured interview (Appendix 8). This invitation process was characterised by meeting with each of these young people individually, talking to them about the research and setting the context for a possible follow up interview. The nature of the interview was explained and every young person was then invited to take part or not. As I did not want the young people to feel that they had to make up their minds there and then, or leaving them with a sense that they were not able to make up their own minds around taking part or not, each young person was allocated a negotiated specific day and time when the follow up interview could take place. Equipped with a sense of the unfolding research process and their right to take part or not, every young person left and made up their own minds as to whether they would present themselves on the allocated day for the follow up interview. The take up rate for the semi-structured interviews was high with no young person deciding not to participate.

### **Phase 2 - Part B: Procedure**

Phase 2 Part B, through the use of semi-structured interviews, explored what selected students had to say about their experience of the transition from primary to secondary school and its effect on their self esteem. Smith (2003, p 9) suggests that the purpose and strength of this approach is “to gain a detailed picture of a respondent’s beliefs about, or perceptions or accounts of, a particular topic”. The strength of this direct and specific yet flexible and fluid qualitative interview was that it provided rich and real information about the reality of the transition as the young people experienced it. It also provided

evidence that could be used to bring about positive change and inform schools on how to best support students and determine policy development around transition in the future (See Appendix 9 for examples of interview transcripts).

Each young person's semi-structured interview followed the same procedure. It began with a welcome to each young person and an exploration the nature and purpose of the research. Each young person was reminded of their choice in deciding to continue to participate in the research. Every young person was invited to make a decision as to whether they were comfortable having their interview recorded. Issues of confidentiality were discussed. Each interview followed the format as outlined in the interview schedule. At the end of each interview, the issue of confidentiality was once again assured and each young person was invited to ask any questions they had or express any concerns they may have had. Prior to closing each interview session, each young person was thanked for their participation and advised that if the need arose for them to access follow on support, they could either contact me through the school or attend to see their school based counsellor. All transcripts were coded and securely stored away awaiting analysis.

### **Phase 2 - Part B: Data analysis**

This data was analysed using the process of Thematic Analysis. This process is outlined at the end of this chapter.

#### **3.5.4: Phase 3: An Overview**

The purpose of this phase was to explore the views on transition that both primary (Phase 3- Part A) and secondary school teachers hold (Phase 3- Part B). Part A used semi structured interviews to explore primary school teachers' views, opinions, perceptions and experiences of the primary to secondary school transition process. Part B involved focus group discussion with secondary school teachers. Phase 3 provided rich information that would be incorporated into the new framework for practice.



### **Selection of Phase 3 - Part A: Primary School Teacher Participants.**

In November 2008, the reminder letter was forwarded to all of the primary school principals (Appendix 10). Following this invitation each of the 13 feeder primary school elected a staff member to participate in the research. A follow up phone call to each of these perspective teachers tentatively organised the interview sessions for the following February. Eventually 8 teachers, all female, were interviewed in February 2009.

### **Phase 3 - Part A: Procedure**

Each of the interviews (n=8) followed the same format. At the beginning of each interview the general research plan and the specifics of the interview that I intended to follow was explored with the teacher. Their consent to participate was once again explored. Before the interview began, each teacher was taken through some important interview details such as issues relating to confidentiality, consequences and so on. I then checked whether teachers were comfortable with the interview being tape recorded. All the teachers were comfortable with this. In terms of the resulting tape, each teacher was made aware of and assured of my commitment to confidentiality. In the knowledge that each and every teacher was at ease in the research setting, the individual interviews then took place, as prompted and scaffolded by the standard semi-structured interview schedule. (See Appendix 11 for the interview format and Appendix 12 for an example of an actual interview transcript).

### **Phase 3 - Part A: Data Analysis**

As each interview concluded, the tapes were coded and stored away securely. Once I was ready, each tape was transcribed verbatim. Each resulting transcript was coded and the tape was once again securely stored. When all 8 transcripts were available, the process of thematic analysis then began. This process is outlined toward the end of this chapter.

### **Phase 3 - Part B: An Outline**

Phase 3 Part B used focus groups to explore the secondary school teachers' views, opinions, perceptions and experiences of the primary to secondary school transition process. This phase provided rich data that would be incorporated into the new framework for practice.

### **Selection of Phase 3 - Part B: Secondary School Teacher Participants**

In November 2008, having gained additional verbal consent from the school principal, I met with all of the secondary school staff in the school staff room. The purpose of this meeting was to brief staff on the general research plan and to extend a general invitation to staff to participate in the research if they so wished. A follow up system of contact was outlined at the end of this meeting and every staff member was invited to take some time to think about involving themselves in the research.

One week later, a follow up invitation to participate letter was placed in the pigeon hole of all teaching staff in the secondary school (Appendix 13). This method of contact was seen as the most appropriate as this method of communication was well established in the school and was a means of communication that all teaching staff were familiar and comfortable with.

In response to the invitation, a total of 10 staff initially expressed an interest in participating in the research. Follow up phone calls were undertaken with each of the perspective participants and dates for the focus groups were planned for February 2009. In final, a total of seven secondary school teachers, five females and two males, decided to participate in the research.

### **Phase 3 - Part B: Procedure**

In February 2009, the secondary school teacher participants were enabled, through the process of focus groups, to give voice to their experience of the annual transition from primary to secondary school process.

A total of 2 focus groups, made up of one groups of 4 and one group of 3, took place on the same day in the school setting. The procedure broadly mirrored the procedure adopted in Phase 2A as did the method of data analysis (See Appendix 14 for an outline of the focus group questions and Appendix 15 for an example of a focus group transcript).

### **3.6: The Process of Thematic Analysis - An Overview**

Thematic Analysis (TA) was the method I employed for analysing the four Phase 2 and Phase 3 data sets. Initially, each of the four data sets (transition questionnaire data, interviews with some of the young people, primary school teacher interviews and secondary school teacher focus groups) was analysed and reported as a separate data unit. This enabled me to share the richness of what all of the young people had said and what both groups of teachers had said. The final analysis, which analysed the initial four data sets as a whole and final data set, combined everything that was said into meaningful research findings.

With a view to making sense of the rich qualitative data, the data analysis technique that best fit my research method, I felt, was that of Thematic Analysis (TA). TA has been described as a search for themes that emerge as being important to a description and understanding of the phenomenon (Daly, Kellehear & Gliksman, 1997, in Fereday & Muir-Cochane, 2006). With a view to working with the data and organising it a way that adequately captured the wholeness that the data and stayed true to what the young people were saying about their experience, I first looked at thematic analysis through a wide lens. In particular the work of Boyatzis, 1998; Yardley and Marks, 2004; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Earley, Cushway and Cassidy, 2007, proved useful at that point.

It is important to note the role that an experienced colleague played in the thematic analysis processes that took place in this research. This was an important part of the process in terms of enhancing the trustworthiness of the research process. For each of the initial four data sets and the final whole

data set, I undertook each coding stage while my colleague engaged in a parallel process. At the end of each coding stage, my colleague and I conferred on the codes and themes that were being developed. Similarities and discrepancies were examined and discussed. This allowed me to reflect on and address possible selective perception and blind interpretative biases that may have been occurring in the analytical process (Patton, 1999).

As a way to learning about and became familiar with procedure of thematic analysis, I found it useful to make reference to the process as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) explain TA as a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within data and which helps one organise and describe data in a very detailed way. The six phases of TA as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) are familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, refining and naming themes and producing the report. However, with a view to engaging in my own process of TA, I choose to be guided by the process of doing TA as outlined by the Open University course Team (2007) in *Exploring Psychological Research Methods*.

Once the data gathering was complete and ready for analysis, the process of thematically analysing what the young people and teachers had said, progressed through the three post interview TA stages of Transcription, Familiarisation and Coding.

**Stage 1: Transcription:** This initial stage was time consuming in the way that I transcribed the interviews as had been recorded on audio tape. Although this was costly in term of time, it was positive for me as it enabled me to become very familiar with what people were saying. It also was the first stage in terms of me developing my thoughts and reaction to what I was hearing. As I was interested in hearing what people were telling me about their experiences, I transcribed words or what they were saying only. I did not engage with the raw data at the deeper level of how the people spoke in terms of hesitations, intonation, pauses, laughs, and so on. Once all of the interviews were ready, Stage 2 then began.

**Stage 2: Familiarisation:** This next stage involved reading through the transcripts while keeping my research questions in mind. At this early stage I began looking at the raw data in a way that enabled me to develop my thinking around the actual and real issues relating to transition that people were telling me about. The reading and re-reading of the transcripts was valuable in the way in which it afforded me time to become familiar with the data. It also enabled me to develop my analytic thought processes around what people were saying. Once I was familiar with the data, next stage in the process began.

**Stage 3: Coding:** The process of coding or indexing the textual data took place with a view to giving the data labels or codes. The Open University Research Methods Course Team (2007) identifies three levels of coding: First Order (descriptive), Second Order (combining descriptive codes) and Third Order or pattern analysis which is thematic analysis.

### **First Order Coding**

This was the lowest level of coding that I engaged in. My goal at this point was to begin organising and categorising the data by capturing chunks (The Open University Research Methods Course Team, 2007) and assigning them codes or labels. This coding was very descriptive in nature and involved minimal interpretation. I was basically applying labels to chunks of data in a way that was meaningful for me at the time. This was done for each interview transcripts. At the end of this first order coding, I was left with a number of refined labels or codes that had meaning for me.

### **Second Order Coding**

At this level of coding, my main aim was to go further than simple description and begin to interpret the meanings of what the people had said to me. At this point, I set about developing labels that captured what some of the initial labels said when grouped meaningfully together. These new labels can be referred to as subordinate constructs and they are more generic than the first

order codes. This stage reduced the number of codes I was left with and afforded me the opportunity to organise the whole of the first order codes into fewer but broader and more encompassing second order codes.

### **Third Order Coding**

At this point, my aim was to develop the themes in a way that led to the realisation of the overarching themes that were evident in the data. It was at this stage that I identified larger-scale patterns than those that I had identified in the second order coding. This stage can also be referred to as pattern coding because this is where I looked for patterns within the data. My overall aim at this point was to develop final overarching themes which adequately captured and reflected what people were saying to me. It was therefore vital that these final themes incorporated several of the lower codes together in a meaningful and real way.

### **3.7: Research Principles Underpinning the Research Process**

Research, explains Mertens (2005) is one of many different ways of knowing and understanding. This research process for me was a journey and an opportunity to find out more. It was also an opportunity to create a greater understanding about the transition from primary to secondary school in an Irish context. As important as the research product was, the research process was just as important. Therefore, in an effort to ensure a rigorous and trustworthy research process, I was eager to set the research process within an ethical framework that was firmly built on a number of research principles. An outline of these research principles is now provided.

#### **3.7.1: Research within a Comprehensive Ethical Framework**

Ethics refers to rules of conduct (Robson, 2002). This research process was carried out within an appropriate ethical framework. The process was guided by the Psychological Society of Ireland's (PSI) *Code of Professional Ethics (2003)* and by the concept of "Ethically Important Moments" as advocated by

Guillemin and Gillam (2004). The PSI, which is Irish equivalent of the British Psychological Society (BPS), provides members with professional guidelines and codes of appropriate ethical conduct when carrying out research. With regard to this research, it must be noted that, as I regarded the young people who participated in the research as social actors and participants, the concept of 'ethical symmetry' (Christensen & Prout, 2002) was considered as an important aspect of this research journey. This means that I held the view that the ethical relationship between me and all participants was the same whether I was interacting with adults or young people who are still regarded as children in legal terms. To this end, the rights, feelings and interests of the young people were given as much consideration as those of the adults who participated in the research.

Guillemain and Gillam (2004) suggest that there are two major ethical dimensions to be considered in any kind of research. These are (a) **procedural ethics**, which usually involves the initial request for and subsequent granting of approval from a relevant ethics committee to undertake the proposed research and (b) **ethics in practice** or the everyday ethical issues that arise in the natural course of the actual research.

In terms of **procedural ethics**, once I had emerged from the process of conceptualising what I wanted to achieve through my proposed research and was clear about how I was going to achieve my proposed research aims, the standard University of East London (UEL) Request for Ethical Approval Form was completed and forwarded to the UEL Ethical Committee. Once approval was granted, the proposed research was then underway. Approval, according to Rumsey and Marks (2004), seals the proposed research as being ethical, worthwhile and well conceived.

**Ethics in practice** generally refers to ethical issues and dilemmas that can arise in the course of the research. These issues need to be thought of from the initial planning stage and continually addressed and reflected upon as the research proceeds. Guillemain and Gillam (2004) suggest that they are to do with "the ethical obligations a researcher has towards a research participant in

terms of interacting with him or her in a humane, non-exploitative way while at the same time being mindful of one's role as researcher" (p.264).

In relation to ethics in practice, Brinkmann and Kvale (2008) suggest four ethical fields that are traditionally explored in ethical guidelines for researchers: informed consent, confidentiality, consequences, and the role of the researcher. Each of these guidelines was woven into an overall ethical framework which was characterised by three main guiding principles, these being the principles of beneficence, respect and justice (Mertens, 2005). Each of Brinkmann's and Kvale's (2008) principles will now be explored in relation to the research.

### **3.7.1.1: Informed Consent**

Informed consent relates to informing, through briefing the research participants, about the nature of the research and obtaining the voluntary participation of the participants with them secure in the knowledge that they have the right to withdraw from the research at any time.

The issue of informed consent was addressed in this research process from the beginning through the use of a funnelling technique. In this manner, an initial letter of invitation to participate in the research was sent to prospective schools through the school principal. The letter shared information about the nature of the research. It also invited the principals to take part or not. The nature of this letter and subsequent correspondence were professional yet personal, respectful, genuine, open and honest in nature and written in a spirit of partnership. This procedure of initial sharing of information and gaining written consent was followed through school principals, parents and finally the young people themselves. Issues of ongoing information sharing was addressed and readdressed through verbal feedback at various stages throughout the research process.

In terms of written consent, although it has been asserted that young peoples' capacity to consent to research has been underestimated (Zwiers &



Morrisette, 1999), I felt that, as all of the young people who participated in this research were minors at the time, it was necessary to secure consent from their parents first. Having secured this, the young people themselves were also invited to decide whether they wished to participate in the research or not. It was also made explicit to the young people that they could 'opt out' of the research at any time. This sharing of information was important for me in terms of being respectful to young people. I felt strongly that the young people should be empowered by giving them a sense of power around whether they wanted to participate in this research or not. They were also empowered by being informed about what they could do in order to withdraw from the research process at any point (Mishna, Antle & Regehr, 2004).

### **3.7.1.2: Confidentiality**

Confidentiality in research addresses the issue of private data (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). This was uppermost in my mind as the research journey progressed. However, along with this aspect of confidentiality, I was also cognisant of the issue of anonymity and security as a means of ensuring a golden thread of confidentiality throughout the research journey. To this end the following procedures were observed:

All participants were briefed about the fact that confidentiality would be observed through out the research process. One exception that was made explicit, especially in the case of the young people, was that if I was made privy to information that indicated to me that a person was in some way at risk, then I would be bound professionally to make that information known to the parents involved. In the data gathering stage, the data analysis stage and the reporting/write up stage, all participants remained anonymous (Creswell, 2003, 2007). To this end, real names were not used and scripts were only meaningful to me as they could only be identifiable according to the special codes that they were assigned. Where names do appear in the final report, these names are pseudo names that were used to add meaning to the research and maintain the real world aspect of the research. At every stage during the research process, all data gathered was securely kept in my

research cabinet. This was secured with a key that was only available to me. As the write up progressed, all written material was stored on a laptop and backed up in a memory stick. Access to these was password protected. The access password was only known to me.

### **3.7.1.3: Consequences**

In referring to the notion of consequences, Brinkmann and Kvale (2008) suggest that it refers to the need for the consequences of any research being addressed with respect to possible harm to the participants as well as the expected benefits of participating in the research. Given the nature of this research, it wasn't anticipated that any participants would feel discomfort or distress during the research process. However, in the possible event of a young person becoming uncomfortable, the provision of appropriate follow-up support was planned for. This system, involved support becoming available through the school counsellor, as had been agreed during the planning stage of the research. This system of support was chosen in the manner in which it would offer a level of ongoing school based support to a young person if necessary.

On the whole, I am confident that this research was undertaken and carried out within an ethical framework that ensured the protection of all participants and systems from any harm or loss and aimed to maintain everyone's' dignity and psychological well-being at all times (Willig, 2001). In terms of consequences, the research questions and the research itself aimed at bringing about positive changes and positive consequences for everyone around transition.

### **3.7.1.4: Role of the Researcher**

In terms of ensuring high quality research, the researcher as a person is crucial (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). In conceptualising the role of the researcher, I found it useful to link in with the 'Meta Code of Ethics', as approved by the European Federation of Psychologists (EFPA), as

summarised by Lindsay (2008). The Meta Code stresses four research guiding principles, these being respect for a person's rights and dignity, competence, responsibility and integrity. The notion of integrity, writes Lindsay (2008), challenges psychologists to be open and straightforward but also calls for psychologists to be self-reflective. This process of self reflection was supported through the present researcher keeping a reflective log as the research progressed (See Appendix 16 for some excerpts that I think show the importance of this form of reflection as I progressed through the research journey).

### **3.7.2: The Researcher as Practitioner-Researcher**

Much real world research exists that explores the tension that can arise when one finds themselves in the dual role of practitioner-researcher. I found much literature in the fields of nursing and occupational therapy that explored the reality of the 'practitioner as researcher' (Curtin & Fossey, 2007; Conneeley, 2002; Frank, 1997; Colbourne & Sque, 2004). The experiences outlined in these personal accounts very much echoed an initial area of concern for me, that concern being the reality that the research participants would have, until the time of this research, known me solely in the context of my role as the school educational psychologist. However, through embarking on this research journey, I felt that I was now, in a way, calling on them to see me as a researcher only. Although the distinction was very clear to me, I knew that it may not have been so clear to the participants. I was aware that this could present as complex and challenging (Hamberg & Johansson, 1999) and could create difficulties that would need to be addressed along the research journey.

However, through the preparatory work that preceded the research, I developed a comfortable sense of myself as practitioner-researcher. I was not conflicted around the duality of the practitioner-researcher role as I had a sense that this research could perhaps broaden the view that others held of my role as an EP. This would be positive in the way that the research process could reinforce for others the real value of research as an effective way of

achieving a purpose rather than being an end in itself (Zeisel, in Robson, 2002, p.535). In fact, I felt that I was ideally placed in terms of carrying out the research and using what I learned for the benefit of the young people and the schools. This confidence mirrors the advantages of the practitioner-researcher role as outlined by Robson (2002) who sees the positive spin-offs of 'insider opportunities', 'practitioner opportunities' and 'practitioner-researcher synergy'. This means that as I had a pre-existing and rich knowledge of the situation, setting and the people involved, there was a significant reduction in terms of potential challenges arising which related to the research process in a holistic sense.

Reflecting on the strength, of the already established research context, in terms of my more 'normal' role as school psychologist to the schools who participated in the research, I felt positive and excited about the prospect of my research unfolding and developing within the warm, honest, open, professional yet personal relationship that had evolved between me and my schools during the previous eight years. This rapport and trust, argues Conneeley (2002), can increase the credibility of the research as familiarity can increase the knowledge of the research focus. However, Conneeley (2002) also points out that a well established relationship can reduce the distance between researcher and participants and that this relationship, mixed with all of the preconceptions, can influence the research.

It was positive to note Cotterill and Letherby (1994), who cited instances where research outcomes were improved because the researcher was classed as 'one of them'. At this point in the research process, I feel that much of the skills that I use in my day to day interactions in schools, added to the research process rather than taking away from it (Colbourne & Sque, 2004). However, having said that, potential tensions and hazards were not unanticipated or unnoticed and were addressed in a proactive way as the research unfolded.

One challenge that did arise for me, as an educational psychologist researcher, was that of defining my role identity as researcher. Colbourne and

Sque (2004) allude to this and suggest that in the case of nurse researchers, the tension arises not only because the researcher is committed to the advancement of knowledge through research but also because as a health care professional the nurse finds it a challenge to distance him/herself from the care and welfare of patients. As a result of what they refer to as 'professional socialisation' a nurse remains primarily a carer and an advocate, a fact that can be difficult to move away from.

In the case of this research, I was aware that I could unwittingly bring an element of my much valued solution focussed way of interacting with others into my research process. Thus, I had to make it clear for myself that my interactions with others, especially while interviewing, were about me as a research 'instrument' (Conneeley, 2002) through which the data would be gathered. It was important for me to remember that my research wasn't about fixing or making things better for others at that particular time. This, at times, seemed to me to be a rather cold and distant way of interacting with people. However, in my head, I rationalised it by taking the advice of Colbourne and Sque (2004) whose work suggested to me the need for any researcher to keep the ultimate goal of his/her research in mind. In my case, this was the creation of knowledge that would inform better practice around the transition between primary and secondary school in Ireland.

Interestingly, throughout the research process, I also found it useful to consider the researcher-participant relationship in terms of what Colbourne and Sque (2004) refer to as a 'professional friend'. This meant that I was clear about interacting with participants in this new and different way. However, if a need arose, I was comfortable with the possibility of having to step out of the somewhat rigid researcher role and support people in a more caring way.

On the whole, during this research journey, I was aware and receptive to the possibility of potential tensions and challenges, arising from my dual role as practitioner-researcher. However, like Colbourne and Sque (2004), I found that using a reflective approach and becoming comfortable as a professional friend were very useful tools in dealing with potential conflicts.

### 3.7.3: Reflexivity

Reflexivity emphasises an awareness of the researcher's own presence in the research journey (Barry, Britten, Barber, Bradley, & Stevenson, 1999). It becomes clear that being a reflective practitioner is a necessary activity if we are to entertain Steier's (1991) assertion that researchers, through their research activity, create worlds. Researchers create worlds by means of the questions they ask, coupled with what they regard as reasonable responses to those questions. Researchers in fact, he claims, construct that which they claim to find. Barry et al. (1999) posit that the point of reflexivity is to improve the quality of the research. They suggest that throughout the research process, a researcher needs to be very aware of the fact that as he/she interacts with participants he/she has a direct effect on the direction and shape that the research takes. For example, a researcher decides what to research, how to frame the questions, how to gather the data and how to analyse the data and present it.

In adopting a reflexive approach during this research journey, I strived to become aware of the role I was playing in shaping the research. (Richardson, 1992, in Rhodes, 2000). To this end, I valued the clarity, insight and understanding I gained through engaging in such research activities as keeping a reflective diary, recording thoughts and eureka moments and ideas on a dictaphone and generally incorporating a reflective thinking dimension to all aspects of the research. I also incorporated concentrated thinking time into my research journey. This ring-fenced time afforded me valuable opportunities and occasions to examine, explore and question my personal assumptions and enabled me to clarify my belief systems and subjectivities (Ahern, 1999). This process, in turn I hoped, would for me, illuminate deeper richer meanings about the personal, theoretical, ethical and epistemological aspects of the research.

The power of the reflexive process was invaluable in the manner in which it afforded me the opportunity to turn my researcher gaze back upon myself with a view to achieving separation from what was occurring in the research

journey (Hawes, 1998). Ultimately, it was an attempt to ensure that the research journey and terminal findings would be reflective of the participants' rather than my perspective.

In an effort to secure a rich tableau of knowledge, that meaningfully and accurately reflected the participants' and not my perspective, I tried to engage with the research in a reflective way at every stage of the research journey. The power of this reflexive action was that it clarified, unstuck, redirected and grounded my thoughts and afforded me the opportunity to proceed in a more confident and comfortable way. It enabled and empowered me to address the issues and challenges that were bubbling beneath the surface at times throughout the journey, the two most significant challenges for me being the need to clarify in my thinking how I should best place the young people in the research and how I could address the potential issue of power in the researcher-participant relationship.

#### **3.7.4: Children, Young People and Research**

A large component of this research was undertaken with a view to gathering the views of young people and constructing a meaningful and accurate picture around their lived experiences of the transition from primary to secondary school. To this end, I found it necessary to have clarity around how I positioned the young people in the research. This, I felt, would have implications for the research in terms of the questions I asked, how I asked them, how I analysed them and how I finally reported them. It would also have implications in terms of the ethical and epistemological frameworks on which the research was built on.

An initial starting point, in the process of locating the young people in the research journey, was becoming accustomed with literature relating to children and research. In terms of learning about children and research, I greatly valued the contribution made by Christensen and Prout (2002). They provided me with a very clear and succinct framework for conceptualising research with children. Once equipped with this new knowledge, I was in a

position to begin the process of thinking and framing my thoughts about the young people with whom I would soon be embarking on my research journey.

Christensen and Prout (2002) outline four perspectives on children in research, these being: the child as object, the child as subject, the child as social actor and the child as participant and co-researcher. Each of these is briefly explained below:

**3.7.4.1: Child as Object:** This is the traditional and still common approach to children in research. It places the child as a person who is acted upon by others rather than as a person who is acting in the world. It sees the child in terms of dependency and the investigation of their lives is from the adult perspective. Research which views the child as an object essentially uses a methodological design that regards the child as vulnerable and incompetent. Researchers see the child as someone who is not capable of receiving or giving accurate information. In terms of research, the child is incapable of understanding any aspect of the process and is unworthy of being able to consent to participate or not. The child has no voice.

**3.7.4.2: Child as Subject:** This perspective sees the child as a person who has subjectivity. However, the level of the child's engagement with research is conditioned by judgements made by adults about their cognitive ability and social competencies. In involving children in research, the researcher who views the child as a subject and informant will be guided by his/her assessment of the child's developmental stage and level of maturity. Age based criteria are typically applied here in terms of inclusion, exclusion and methodological procedures.

**3.7.4.3: Child as Social Actor:** This perspective is closely akin to the child as subject but the recognition has evolved and extended to see children as social actors with their own experiences and understandings. Children are seen to interact meaningfully in their environment, can bring about change and be changed by it. Children seen as social actors are given central and autonomous conceptual status as they participate in research and this



perspective does not take any distinction between adults and children for granted. This means that when a person is deciding on a method for working with children, the principle is the same as it would be when working with adults. In this way, the method used must be appropriate for the people involved in the study, regardless of whether they are children or not.

**3.7.4.4: Child as Participant and Co-Researcher:** This perspective sees children as active participants in the research process. It emphasises participation rights. It also regards research and children's active participation in it as only meaningful if children are recognised and respected as fellow human beings and active citizens. Research in which children are respected as participants or co-researchers affords children the space to be involved, consulted, informed and heard.

Within this research context, it was very empowering for me (and the whole research process) that I had this knowledge of the varying perspectives on children in research. The power of this knowledge constantly challenged me to acknowledge the manner in which I was thinking about the young people involved in the research. Through engagement with the research in a reflexive way, changes evolved in my thinking. Initially, I may have regarded the young people as subjects. Then, I began regarding the young people as social actors. Finally, I found myself aspiring for them to become co-researchers. This evolution in my thinking was a great asset at times throughout the research journey. It was great at times when I was interviewing young people and I realised that I was becoming overly data driven, uncomfortable with silence, or uncomfortable with the fact that the interview was potentially becoming more of an interrogation than an interview. It was also a stabilising factor when I realised that I was becoming anxious, distracted and overly concerned about the quality of the interview in terms of it realising my own agenda. These occasions, had it not been for my ability, willingness and openness to think critically and in a reflexive way, could have been damaging to the research process, disrespectful to the participants and detrimental in the negative effect it could have had on the balance of power within the researcher-participant relationship.

### **3.7.5: The Researcher-Participant Relationship**

While interacting with the young people involved in the research, I came to think of them as active and competent participants or social actors who were very capable of speaking for themselves and speaking in a way that provided reliable information about their situation (Antle, Regehr, & Mishna, 2004). This view automatically, in my mind, increased the young peoples' ability to participate in the research. It was a positive step in addressing any potential power imbalances in the research settings or more specifically the power imbalances that can favour the researcher rather than the participant (Harden, Scott, Backett-Milburn, & Jackson, 2001; Russell and Kelly, 2002).

In general, disparities in the power and status between adults and children can present as one of the biggest ethical challenges for researchers working with young people (Morrow & Richards, 1996). However, despite a researcher's eagerness and willingness to firstly acknowledge possible power imbalances and secondly become solution focused about ways to equalise the power in the researcher-participant relationship, Mishna, Antle, and Regehr (2004) contend that a researcher always unwittingly has a distinct advantage. Certain variables, such as the setting in which the research takes place, a participant's belief that non-participation could result in reprisal, can imbue the researcher with status and power that he/she may be unaware of or may be unwilling to challenge.

However, with a view to minimising the power imbalance that can exist in the research-participant relationship, and endeavouring to create a space in which the young people and indeed adults could express themselves clearly (Mauthner, 1997), I remained vigilant and adopted a number measures throughout the research process.

At the beginning of each and every interaction, be it with individuals or groups and at every stage during the research process, a number of important issues were explored. These related mainly to such issues as my role as researcher and the purpose of the research, which was clearly explained (Morrow, 2009).

Important issues such as confidentiality, consent and assent, participants' rights, fear of reprisal for non-participation were explored with the participants. Opportunities for clarification and questions were encouraged from participants. All explorations, discussions, and conversations were conducted in a spirit of partnership which was characterised by honesty, openness, genuineness.

Throughout the research I strived to put participants at ease and I vigilantly assessed their comfort levels. I was careful not to take things at face value. For instance, in one case, a young person had given written consent to participate in the research. However, in the interview setting their body language prompted me to question the nature of voluntariness in this instance. At every opportunity, the data gathering sessions were conducted in a non-threatening and comfortable manner. Participant's right to decide and have control over what they said and how much they said was respected at all times. As I felt that some of the young people, who may have a Special Educational Need, may have felt self conscious and fearful of exposure through the research process, I was sensitive to supporting young people who seemed to have difficulty accessing the process and I strived to provide support in the least conspicuous manner possible. All of the young people were encouraged to express themselves freely while writing and were encouraged not to pay too much heed to the conventions of writing. The language I used (Edmonds, 2003) was at all times clear and simple. This was to ensure ease of understanding amongst all young people. Throughout the research process I was committed to reflexive practice and I continuously engaged with my own reactions and the reactions of others.

The strategies outlined above were valuable to the research process as they allowed and enabled the young people and adults to express themselves in a comfortable and real way. The strategies also minimised the possibility of the research process reinforcing the view of children as incompetent or portraying them as victims (Thomas & O' Kane, 1998).

### **3.7.6: Ensuring 'Trustworthiness' in the Research Process**

Through out this research journey, the issue of the 'trustworthiness' of the research was important to me. Much background reading informed my views on the nature of evaluating research and qualitative research in particular (Meyrick, 2006; Whitmore, Chase & Mandle, 2001; Dixon-Woods, Shaw, Agarwal, & Smith, 2004). I greatly valued the work of Devers (1999). Arising from the work of Devers (1999), this research process was carried out in a way that enabled me to assess how the research process was proceeding in terms of credibility or internal validity, transferability or external validity, dependability or reliability and confirmability or objectivity. (See Appendix 17 for additional details relating to the 'trustworthiness' of this research process).

Triangulation methods were an important part of the research process. I believed that triangulation would contribute to the overall verification and validation of the qualitative analysis. The four main methods of triangulation used in the research process were those as outlined by Quinn-Patton (1999). These were: methods triangulation, triangulation of sources, analyst triangulation and theory/perspective triangulation.

### **3.7.7: Exploring Participant Feedback on Sharing of Findings**

Once all the data was analysed, I felt that it was important to share the findings with the people who participated in the research. This was important in terms of ensuring the internal validity of the findings and in terms of working with the young people in a way that afforded them the opportunity to be more of a participant in the research, as opposed to objects or mere subjects.

This sharing was carried out in a very informal way with a random selection of ten of the young people who had already participated in the research. I met with this group with a view of sharing my thoughts and findings with them. I also wanted to get a sense of their reactions to the sense that I had made of what they had said about transition their transition experiences. The feedback was positive and encouraging in the manner in which this group of young

people expressed their satisfaction that the findings reflected the realities of the transition as they had experienced them.

### **3.8: Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, issues relating to methodology and the research methods that were chosen to answer the research questions were outlined and explored. This chapter began with an overview of the research design and some of the epistemological considerations that informed the research design choice. The research context was outlined and this was followed by a detailed exploration of the three distinct research phases. An outline of thematic analysis was offered and prior to concluding, an exploration of the research principles that underpinned the research process was provided.

# Chapter 4: Findings

## 4.1: Overview of Chapter

This chapter will present the results of the research. It will begin with the results of the quantitative Phase 1 of the research (4.2). This will be followed by the results of the qualitative phases of Phase 2 and Phase 3 (4.3, 4.4). This chapter will conclude with an overview of the main findings of the research (4.5) and a chapter summary (4.6)

As one proceeds through this the results section, the research questions being addressed are outlined and presented in a caption box. This, it is hoped, will enable each research question to be kept in mind as the findings are outlined. It also breaks up this long section into more manageable and meaningful components.

## 4.2: Findings of Phase 1

**Research Question 1:** Do young people's experiences of the transition from primary to secondary school have a positive or negative effect on their self-esteem as measured by the self rating self-esteem measure?

This first Phase (Phase 1, Part A and B), which was the initial quantitative phase, was designed with a view to exploring research question 1.

To this end, a total of 84 young people completed the SDQ-11 questionnaire on two occasions, these being pre-transition (Time 1) and post transition (Time 2). Once the data collection was complete, and all of the raw data was inputted into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Once this was complete, a paired samples t-test was applied to each individual young person's data set. This was to ascertain whether a statistically significant difference was evident in their global self-esteem mean scores from Time 1 (pre-transition) and Time 2 (post-transition). Please see Appendix 18 for each young person's pre and post transition self esteem scores.

Through SPSS, a print off of a series of statistical tables was available for each young person. Statistical significance in every case was measured by referring to the probability value, with a value of less than .05 providing evidence of a statistically significant difference. Once this was established, the next step is to determine which set of scores was higher (Time 1 or Time 2). This was done by comparing the mean scores for every young person on both times. Final results are as follows:

Table 3: Changes in Young Peoples' Transition Global Self-esteem Levels.

Changes in young peoples' pre-transition and post-transition global self esteem levels.	Number of persons (N=84)
No significant change	70
Significant increase	10
Significant decrease	4

The analysis, interpretation and reporting of this quantitative data is based on a broad framework of statistical significance with percentages being rounded off for the purpose of clarity and simplicity.

From the information provided above, it is evident that a total of 70 young people or 82% of all participants experienced no statistically significant changes in their self-reported global self-esteem levels during the transition between primary and secondary school. A statistically significant increase in global self-esteem levels was reported by 10 young people (13%) and four young people or 5% reported a statistically significant decrease in global self esteem following the transition.

An initial reading of these statistics might lead a reader to conclude that this information frames the transition from primary school to secondary school in a very positive way. It must be acknowledged that the combined rate of 'no change' and 'increase' in self-esteem levels is very positive with 80 out of 84 of the young people or 95% falling into this category. However, although it

appears small, it must also be recognised that 4 young people or 5% reported a statistically significant decrease in their levels of self esteem.

The fact that four young people reported that they experienced a statistically significant decrease in their self-esteem levels during the transition was a little surprising for me. Given that the transition practices in both the primary and secondary school were, in my opinion, somewhat informal and unfocused, I was expecting that a greater number of young people would have experienced greater transition difficulties which in turn would have had more negative consequences for their self-esteem levels. The fact that a decrease in self-esteem levels was the least reported category left me questioning whether the transition journey is simply a journey that young people have to embark on and get thorough without much fuss. However, in ensuring more favourable outcomes for **every** young person, one young person (not to mind four young people experiencing a fall in their self esteem during the transition from primary to secondary school) is too large a number for me as an educational psychologist.

#### **4.2.1: Findings in Relation to Research Question 1**

It may be concluded that although an extremely high percentage of the young people do move through the transition process with no changes and in some cases an increase in their self-esteem levels. However, not all young people are so fortunate. This needs to be addressed so not few, not some but all young people move into, move through and move out of the transition from primary to secondary school without experiencing negative changes in self-esteem.

#### **4.3: Findings of Phase 2A -Transition Questionnaire**

To recap, this Phase of the research was characterised by the young people completing the questionnaire (Phase 2A) and the young people undertaking semi-structured interviews (Phase 2B). The findings of Phase 2 Part A were as follows:



**Research Question 2:** What do young people tell us about their experience of the primary to secondary school transition journey?

In January 2009, having made the transition between the primary and the secondary school in early September, the 97 perspective First Year students were invited to complete a questionnaire that explored their thoughts, feelings and ideas about the school transition that they were living through. A total of 87 young people completed the questionnaire at that time. The data provided an initial overall overview of the young peoples' transition experiences. It provided rich information that told the story of what the transition process was like for all of the young people. A content analysis of each of the questionnaire items follows. (See Appendix 19 for details of each content analysis process).

In response to an invitation to express in a **word** that captured or reflected how the transition experience was for each person, 50 of the young people choose a word that reflected their experience of the transition as wholly positive, 11 choose a word that reflected their experience of the transition as wholly negative, 4 choose a word combination that contained both positive and negative elements and the remaining 22 picked a word that was more generic and neutral. A visual breakdown of these four categories is as follows:

Table 4: How Young People Describe Their Transition Experience

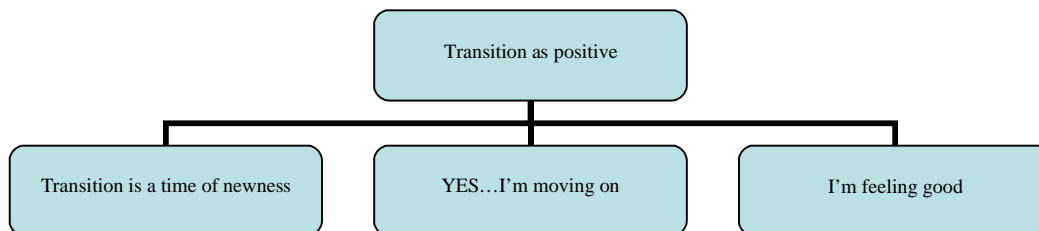
Category	Chosen Word(s) and frequency
Positive (50)	Exciting (11), Good (11), Easy (2), Fun (6), Brilliant (4), Fantastic (1), Great (7), Exhilarating (1), Mighty (1), Happy (2), OK (1), Alright (1), Class (1), Relief (1).
Negative (11)	Sad (3), Scary(3) , Difficult (2), Tiring (1), Tough (1), Not good (1)
Combination (4)	Exciting and nervous (4)
Neutral (22)	Change (7), Different (7), Interesting (3), Big (3), Longer(1), Unreal(1)

### 4.3.1: I use this word because...

#### Transition as **positive**

A content analysis of the factors that some young people attributed to their transition as being a positive experience for them highlighted the following three themes: **Transition is a time of newness, Yes...I'm moving on and I'm feeling good.**

Figure 3: Factors Relating to Transition as Positive.



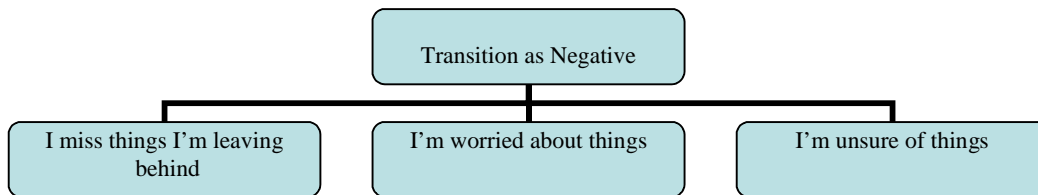
For many young people, **transition is a time of newness** and the anticipation of new things. For these young people newness relates to “new friends”, “new subjects”, “new teachers” and “new experiences”. This notion of newness is positive in the context of the transition being heralded as the next step in terms of **Yes...I'm moving on**. It is regarded positively as “a change”, with young people feeling “ready to go” or it simply being “time to go”. It might be that young people see the transition as a sign of growth. The transition can also be positive in the way that it simply makes young people reflect that **I'm feeling good** with this time being reported as “exciting”, “a happy time”, “a fun time” and an “easy time”.

The ideas of newness, moving on and positive feelings are powerful indicators of transition being a positive time for some young people. This positivity is a powerful force at this crucial time and is an aspect of transition that we, as supporters of young people, should be aiming to reinforce, maintain and capitalise upon as we manage transition for these young people.

## Transition as Negative

When responses were clustered into themes around transition as negative, the following three themes were identified, these being the themes of: **I miss things I'm leaving behind, I'm worried about things, I'm unsure of things.**

Figure 4: Factors Relating to Transition as Negative.



In relation to **I miss things I'm leaving behind**, some young people found it negative that they had, during the transition journey, left behind “old friends”, left behind their “old school” and left behind many of the activities that they enjoyed in the primary school setting. Aspects of their previous primary school life and some of the experiences they enjoyed there were going to be missed. The fact that they do miss aspects of the primary school experience and perhaps experience personal loss during the transition journey is positive for me as it implies that the primary school was a place that held many positive experiences for them.

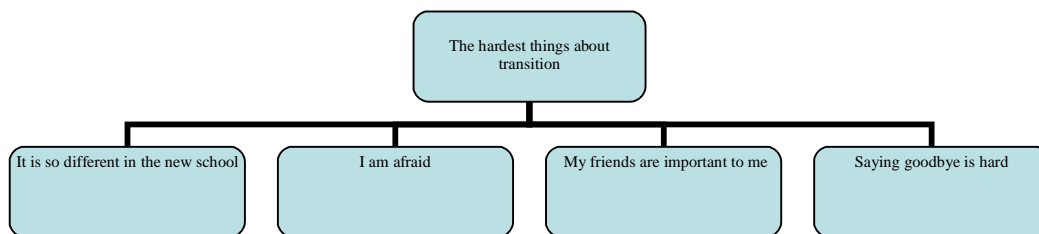
In terms of the transition journey, it can be a time of worry for some young people. This was expressed in terms of **I'm worried about things**. Young people can worry about “not fitting in”, “getting into trouble” and worry about how different it is going to be. This time can also be a time when **I'm unsure of things** with uncertainty evident around the notion of change and some potential obstacles such as “bullying”, “confidence”, and the prospect of “change”.

In terms of my role as an EP, these expressions of loss, worry and uncertainty are important pieces of information as they express sentiments that can be addressed as we support young people around transition.

### 4.3.2: The hardest things about the transition for me

What do young people experience as the 'hardest thing' about the transition from primary to secondary school? An analysis of reported factors revealed the following four themes of: **It is so different in the new school, I am afraid, My friends are important to me and Saying goodbye is hard.**

Figure 5: Factors Relating to the Hardest Thing about Transition.

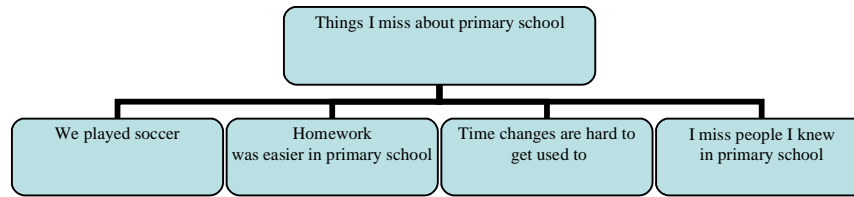


In terms of overall themes, one of the 'hardest things' for these young people related to their experience that **it is so different in the new school**. The biggest differences related to a different and bigger school, different classes, different break times, different people and differing time routines. In saying **I am afraid** young people may be expressing their anxiety around the prospect and reality of finding themselves confused about finding their way around the new and bigger school. The recurring themes of **my friends are important to me** and saying **goodbye is hard** were also evident

### 4.3.3: Three things I really missed about primary school.

When responses were clustered into themes around the aspects of the primary school that the young people missed, the following four themes were identified: **We played soccer, Homework was easier in primary school, Time changes are hard to get used to and I miss people I knew in primary school.**

Figure 6: Factors Relating to Things I miss About Primary School.



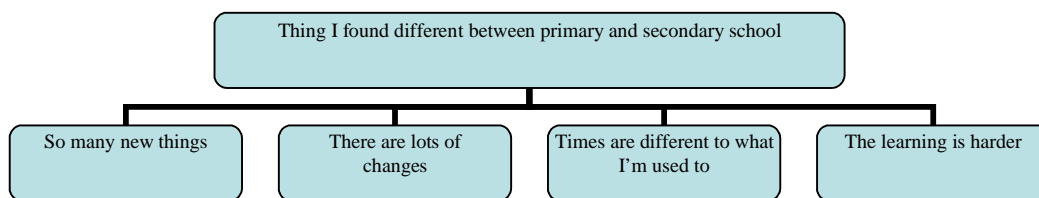
From the information presented above we can see that some young people missed the fact that they played **more soccer** in primary school. **Homework was easier in the primary school** is evidenced by the fact that in secondary school it increases in volume, difficulty and frequency. The new homework schedule also takes getting used to with many missing the ‘easier’ and ‘less of’ aspects of homework in primary school. For some young people the new **time changes are hard to get used to**. The longer secondary school day is an issue for some young people. An additional difficulty for some is having to get up later and getting home later. Once again, some young people miss old primary school teachers and friends as expressed in their admission that **I miss people I knew in primary school**.

In exploring what young people have to say about the things they missed from primary school, it becomes evident that there are certain things that can be done to make the new adjustment easier and more comfortable for young people. Exploring the possibility of opportunities to play more soccer is easy. However, it is also evident that many of the things they miss about primary school are inevitable realities of the new school system and are harder to change. However, rather than attempting to change everything, we can prepare young people for these changes, give them skills and knowledge to adapt to the new changes and equip them with the coping skills and confidence to make their own changes as they move into, through and out of the transition journey.

#### 4.3.4: Three things I found different between primary and secondary school

When responses were clustered into themes around the main differences they experienced between their old primary school and their new secondary school, four themes were identified, these being the themes of **So Many, Changing, Time and Learning**.

Figure 7: Factors Relating to Differences Between Schools.

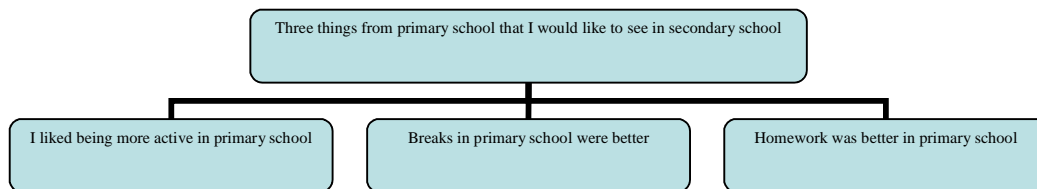


Life in secondary school appears to be somewhat overwhelming in terms of young people now experiencing **so many new things** such as new people, classrooms, subjects, teachers and facilities. This certainly must be a big change from the daily routine in the primary school which usually meant staying put in one classroom and being taught a smaller range of subjects by a single teacher. This aspect of 'so many' seems to be compounded by the fact that **there are lots of changes** that occur on a regular basis in the secondary school system, with young people now being expected to respond to the need to routinely change classrooms and cope with the constant changing of teachers who deliver a much wider range of subjects. Some young people see difference in the fact that they now have new facilities to get used to like the canteen and lockers. Along with all this change, young people can find it a new challenge to adjust the fact that times **are different to what I'm used to**. Changes occur in start and finishing times, lunch times, longer day in school and greater travelling times. Time changes also mean getting up earlier and getting home later. Added to this is the fact that the learning **is harder**. Young people now have to cope with harder homework and more of it.

#### 4.3.5: Three things from primary school that I would like to see in secondary school

When responses were clustered into themes around the aspects of primary school life followed on into their new secondary, three themes were identified, these being the themes of: **I liked being more active in primary school**, **Breaks in primary school were better** and **Homework was better in primary school**.

Figure 8: Factors Relating to Follow On Things I would Like



Now that the young people are in secondary school, they appear to feel a need to be more active as they **liked being more active in primary school**. They would like more sports, more general activities and more trips. This is interesting as it seems to contradict a previous assertion by Simmons and Blythe (1987) that young people who make the transition to secondary school decrease their participation in extracurricular activities. This research would tend to indicate that rather than choosing to decrease their extracurricular activities, schools do not provide young people with enough extracurricular activities and opportunities. Young people said they would also like to have more activities with which to occupy themselves during break time as they did in primary school. This is important for young people as **breaks in primary school were better**. Many young people still value the fact that **homework was better in the primary school**. This is again evidenced in their reporting that that they received less homework in the primary school setting and no homework at the weekends.

In relation to homework, which has been highlighted in what the young people say about their transition experience, it begs the question of whether some

young people struggle with this aspect of life in the new secondary school setting. Is homework something that needs to be looked at within a growth mindset with a view to supporting young people or is it a new fact of life that the young people simply have to get on with? As an EP who strives to support all young people around learning and reaching their potential, I believe that this is an important question for the secondary school and an issue that warrants further exploration in the future.

#### 4.3.6: Support I feel I would benefit from

Reponses addressing the issue of support that the young people feel they could have benefited from pre-transition in both the primary and secondary school settings, immediately post transition in the new secondary school setting and now in the secondary school setting are presented in the table below.

Table 5: Young Peoples' Views Around Supports I Would Benefit From.

Pre-transition primary school	Pre-transition secondary school	Immediately post transition-then	Post transition- now
Teach us languages 10	More information...talk 10	Put us in same class as our old friends 5	Study groups 6
More Irish 5	Speaker 9	Help us picking subjects 5	Less homework 5
Talk to us 5	More than one tour of the school 9	Older students to show us around 4	Bullying committee 4
More Science 4	Information leaflet 5	Try all subjects in First Year 4	Take bullying more seriously 4
More and harder work 3	Show us all the rooms 4	Help us find rooms 4	Student council 3

Now that they are in secondary school and taking a look back at when they were preparing for the transition in primary school, the young people report that they could have benefited from an introduction to learning experiences that prepared them for the new learning experiences that they now know they would experience in the new school setting. From what they have said, one can ascertain that they would have liked to have had a taste of the languages, such as Irish and Science that they would soon be encountering. The also



suggested that there should be more “talk” about the journey they were about to take.

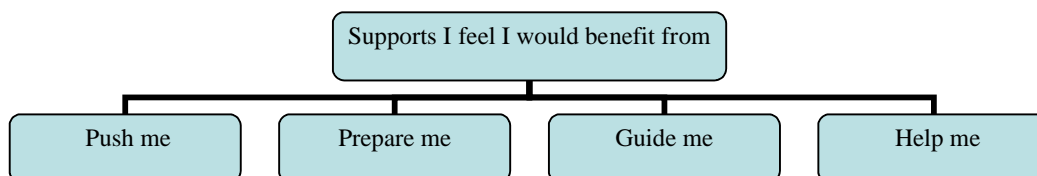
Prior to leaving the primary school setting, students now upon reflection, suggested a number of ways that they feel the secondary school could have supported them to a greater degree. Once again, they suggested that they could have received more information from the secondary school. This could have been provided in the form of a speaker coming to talk to them. An information leaflet was also suggested as a way of providing information that would guide them along their journey. This is a valuable insight as these are supports which did not occur at this time but could easily be implemented in the future. Another suggestion addressed the possibility of more than one visit to the secondary school and the possibility of being shown around the school. This might go a long way to alleviate fears related to confusion with finding one’s way around.

Having made the transition to the new setting, some young people, upon reflection, suggested that they might have felt more supported if they had been placed in the same class as some of their old friends. Some may have experienced a challenge around this in the manner in which the First Year class places are assigned on a random basis. Along with the recurring theme of the importance of friends in the transition process, issues relating to guidance around making subject choices, trying all subjects and finding classrooms were also evident.

Finally, now that young people had spent time in the secondary school it was evident that they seemed to have settled and appeared more at ease in terms of finding their way around. It was evident that their ideas around support changed to other issues such as bullying and study. Having adjusted to life in the new school setting, students became concerned with addressing structures that would support them around other challenges they now faced, these predominantly being study and bullying.

When responses were clustered into themes around support, four themes were identified. These themes are organised in terms of the main message that students were giving at each of the four transition support points. These messages are as follows: **Push me, Prepare me, Guide me and Help me.**

Figure 9: Young Peoples' Ideas around Transition Support



The evidence suggests that young people experience a new and higher level of learning in the secondary school in terms of the amount of learning and work and the difficulty of that learning and work. In response to this new reality and speaking in terms of '**Push Me**', some young people seem to unwittingly and indirectly make reference to the merits of exploring the 'curriculum continuity' versus 'curriculum discontinuity' and 'follow on' versus 'fresh start' debate. The young people in advocating for a push on learning in the primary school in the form of "introduce the new books", may offer an insight into their thinking that the jump in the learning experience from primary to secondary school is a vast one and that in order to be able to adjust to the new learning demands of secondary school, they would benefit from actually being exposed to similar learning experiences in the primary school. It is evident that some of these young people would welcome a follow on approach. However, there are two types of follow on. The reality is that work levels do increase in the secondary school. Is it better to make secondary school easier as some have been suggesting or to prepare students by giving them prior experience of the new already established reality of life and learning in secondary school?

Having access to more information before they leave primary school is highlighted here. Lots of suggestions were mentioned in term of how that

information could be given and shared. Young people would welcome a “tell us” approach that also “allows us to ask questions”. They want to find out about the new experiences of “lockers” and “clocking in”, and they want to be “shown how timetables work”. “A map of the school” would help as might “show us a video of the new school”.

While still in the primary school setting and preparing for the move to secondary school, the young people here have highlighted their wish that the secondary school would ‘**Prepare Me**’. They want access to experiences that gives them a taste of what life in secondary school will be like. This could be done by “coming in for a longer induction”, “telling us about the school”, “showing us the rooms”, “bring out a speaker”, give us “leaflets” and “handouts”. Really crucial to preparing them is the recurring theme of more information. The young people want more information and once again, if they are not sure about what information they want, they would welcome opportunities that afford them opportunities to ask questions and learn from others who can answer their questions. A message here is that they would benefit from having all the theory they desire but would also like to get the chance to apply this theory to the new real life setting.

Once in the new setting, the young people still appear to have lots of questions and uncertainties. They want a **guide me** approach that would offer them support around this new experience and want people to “make sure that we are getting on OK”. Worries still remain about getting into the new routine of finding one’s “way around”. However, these difficulties could be overcome by offering guidance in the form of “getting an older student to show us around” and “a couple of days with a First Year until we get used to it”.

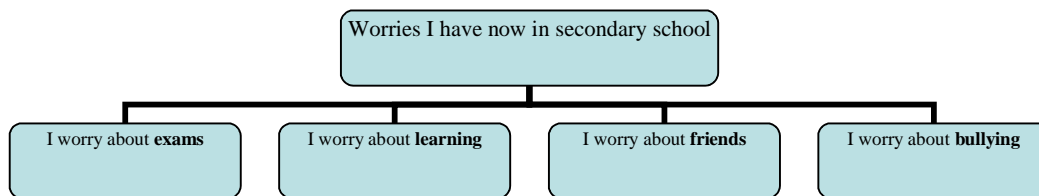
After some time in the new school setting, the young people appear to adjust to life in the new school setting. They are finding their ways around and coping with the new demands to a greater degree. However, as these initial teething issues are left behind, some young people can become preoccupied with other issues associated with new school life, these being safety in terms of bullying and the new curriculum demands. In relation to these challenges,

young people say they would like people to **help me**. It is interesting that for the first time, reference has been made to the young people having more of a say in what is happening to them. This is evident in the references to “committee” and “council”.

#### 4.3.7: Worries I now have in secondary school

When responses were clustered into themes around worries, four themes were identified. These themes are as follows: **I worry about exams, I worry about learning, I worry about friends** and **I worry about bullying**.

Figure 10: Young Peoples Post-Transition Worries.

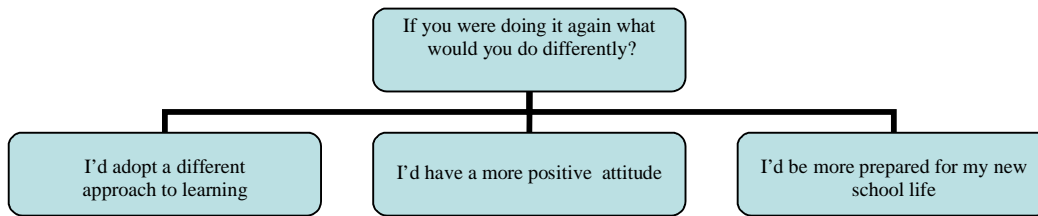


**Exams** and worries around these emerge as the primary concern for some of the young people. They worry about school exams and future state examinations. Perhaps related to this is the recurring theme of the nature of the work and **learning** that they are now being expected to engage in. Ongoing challenges, relating to making and losing of **friends** features again, as does the issue of **bullying**.

#### 4.3.8: If you were doing it again, what would you do differently

When responses were clustered into themes around what I'd do differently, three themes were identified. These themes are as follows: **I'd adopt a different approach to learning, I'd have a more positive attitude, and I'd be more prepared for my new school life**.

Figure 11: What Young People Would Do Differently



In response to this question, 49 or 56.32% of the young people reported that they would do nothing differently if they were to go through the same process again. The remaining 38 young people reported a total of 80 things that they might do differently.

In terms of doing things differently, the predominant theme relates to the young people reporting that **I'd adopt a different approach to learning**. It appears that some young people are now beginning to adapt to the learning and curricular demands that they now find themselves engaging in. They are becoming aware that to adapt to these changes and to meet the new and bigger curriculum related demands, there are certain behaviours that they can now engage in and will benefit from engaging in. They can study more, try harder, listen more carefully and complete homework.

In relation to adopting a different attitude, some young people disclosed that **I'd have a more positive attitude**. It appears that some young people are now acknowledging that the transition may not have been as difficult as they had heard or expected and all initial challenges fade away so there is no point in worrying about them. If they were to go through the transition again, they would now opt to worry less about it, relax about it, enjoy it and care less about what others think. Others on the other hand many have been a bit too relaxed about the move and would now take it more seriously.

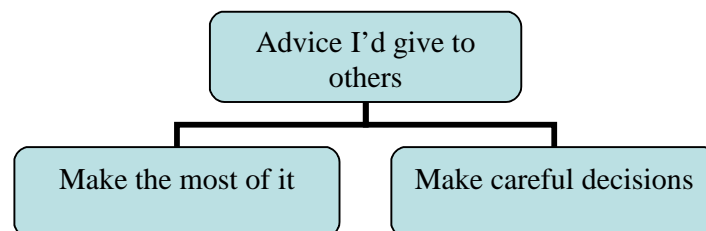
In relation to school life in the new secondary school, some young people reported that **I'd be more prepared for my new school life**. It seems that some young people would like to be more prepared if they had a second

chance. They would be prepared in the way that they would be more au fait with essential everyday activities like knowing the timetable. Others would engage in more activities like sport while others would not suffer in silence and would opt to “confide in others about problems”.

It is interesting to note that the top four things that some young people might do differently, if they were to make the transition again, relate to things that many young people have the power to do themselves. These are also things that these young people can still do, if they choose to do so. This is an important insight as it suggests that young people can benefit from support that encourages and enables them to take greater responsibility for making positive changes based on their own needs. It also suggests that this period in a young persons life may be a window of opportunity in terms of young people being receptive to and open to benefiting from an environment and school ethos that encourages and reinforces certain types of behaviours such as taking greater responsibility for learning, developing study skills, becoming more organised, quality time management and so on. However, in relation to choosing subjects more carefully, making change here is not as easy as they are now in school with two months. This is an area which needs to be addressed with young people as a matter of urgency and at a much earlier stage as it is a worry for roughly 10% of the young people.

#### 4.3.9: The advice I would give to others

Figure 12: Advice Young People Would Give to Others



An initial content analysis of what the young people said in relation to advice they would give to others reveals that 32 out of the 87 young people who

participated in this research may have been worried or scared about the move to secondary school. However, despite this, prospective new entrants are advised not to expend too much negative energy around the transition journey. The two themes that were identified in relation to advice are: **make the most of it** but also **make decisions carefully**. In relation to **make the most of it** they are advised to enjoy it and have fun. This advise and knowledge is a great strength in terms of passing it onto others who are about to make the transition in the future. In relation to **making decisions carefully**, advice was given around deciding to make new friends early on in the transition. Advice was also given in relation to choosing subjects carefully. This might highlight later difficulties that arise when a young person realises that they made a wrong decision are now doing a subject which they do not like. The benefits of ‘working hard’ were also a valuable piece of advice that these young people would pass on to others.

#### 4.3.10: Young peoples’ self-rating scores in relation to their post-transition feelings about how successful the transition was for them

Table 6: Young Peoples’ Self Rating Scores of Their Transition Experience.

Self Rating score	Boys	Girls	Total (N=87)	Percentage of Total
10	15	14	29	33.33
9	8	9	17	19.54
8	9	10	19	21.83
7	5	1	6	6.89
6	2	3	5	5.74
5	6	2	8	9.19
4	-	1	1	1.14
3	-	1	1	1.14
2	1	-	1	1.14
1	-	-	-	-
0	-	-	-	-
No response	-	-	-	-

When the young people were invited to rate how successful they felt their transition experience was, their responses indicate that more that four fifths

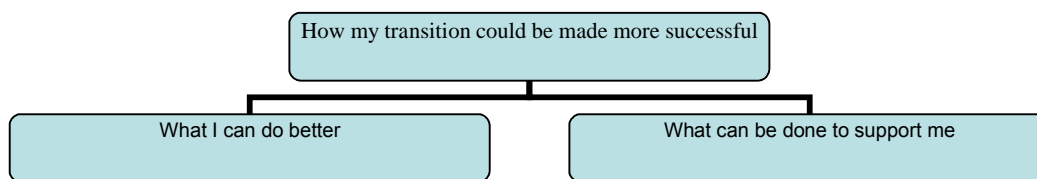
(81.59%) placed themselves within the 'successful' range of 7-10. Less than one fifth (16.07%) reported themselves within the 'OK' range of 4-6. Two young people or just over 2% placed themselves in the lower extreme of the 'not so successful' range of 0-3.

At first glance the above table seems very positive in the picture of transition that it paints. Over 98% of the young people reported that the transition had gone well or OK for them. Of course this is very positive. But what of 2% for whom it didn't go so well. Though the percentage may be very small, it can in some way belittle the harsh reality that two young people feel that it didn't go well for them. This means that it went well for some but not all of the young people. This notion of **all** was the focus of this research.

#### 4.3.11: How my rating could be improved

The young peoples' responses in relation to how my rating could be improved were clustered into the following two themes: **What I can do better** and **things that can be done to support me**.

Figure 13: Young Peoples' Views of How My Rating Could Be Improved.



From the point of view of how the transition experience of the young people could be improved, some young people report that there are things **that I can do better**, but there are also things that **can be done to support me**. Young people report that they could try harder, relax, make better choices and generally prepare better for the transition. In terms of what can be done for them, they report that they would welcome more information, look at the environment into which they are going in terms of breaks, homework and bullying.



#### 4.3.12: Interesting issues that arise in the exploration of this data of what young people had to say about their experience of the transition from primary to secondary school

##### What the young people are not saying

The questionnaire that the young people responded to provided a lot of rich and valuable information. This information provided a very useful insight into the transition experiences of the young people who participated in this research. This information is an integral part of the final transition support framework that is proposed in this research.

Although the young people had lots to say and share, many instances were evident where the young people said nothing. I believe that an exploration of this can provide rich information about young people and their experience of transition. For ease of accessibility and to aid understanding, the table below outlines the areas that the questionnaire explored. It also provides the number of instances in each area that young people made a ‘no’ response.

Table 7: Young Peoples’ View of How My Rating Could Be Improved

YP responses to ...	‘No’ responses out of 87 possible responses
Word to describe transition	5
Explanation of choice	5
Hardest thing	15
Thing I missed about primary	2
3 things I found different	2
Characteristics of primary to secondary	21
Pre-transition support from primary	44
Pre-transition support from secondary	46
Post transition support –then	50
Post transition support now	70
My worries now	35
What I’d do differently	49
Advice to others	5
Rating my transition	0
How it could be improved.	45

Based the above information, I believe that two main points are worthy of note. It is evident that young people can communicate openly and with ease when describing their transition experience. However, in terms of communicating about supports they feel they need, the young people seem less able or reluctant to do so. This ‘silence’ is worthy of further exploration. It is an issue which arises again at a later time in this research and is an aspect of this research that will be explored to a greater degree later in this thesis.

#### **4.3.13: Findings in Relation to Research Question 2**

In answer to what young people tell us about their experience of the primary to secondary school transition journey the following is evident:

The majority of young people looked back on their transition as being a positive experience for them. However, some young people described their journey in a negative way. Some young people experienced the transition as positive in the manner in which it presented them with new experiences, gave them a sense that they are moving on and was generally a happy time. Friendships featured strongly in transition as positive.

Some young people found aspects of the transition difficult, such as their sense that they were leaving something behind. The journey was sometimes a time of worry and uncertainty. Some young people faced challenges along the way. These included coping with new things in the secondary school, facing fears, adapting to friendship changes and saying goodbye to their old school and what they knew.

‘Friends’ was a concern. Some young people missed what they were used to in the old school setting. Lunch time, homework, time schedules and people they know in the old school were reported as things they missed. Some young people were confronted with big changes when they entered the new school. The biggest differences reported were the changes in the new number of people, classrooms, subjects, teacher and facilities. Other differences were the reality of changing classes and changing teachers in the new school, new

time routines and more and harder work. Some young people would like to have more to do in secondary in the way of sports, activities and trips. Break times can be boring and the new intensity of learning can be challenging.

Some young people spoke of the support they would welcome as they moved into, moved through and moved out of the transition journey. In primary school they would like to be pushed more and have access to more information about the secondary school and the change they will experience. As they begin life in the new secondary school, some young people would welcome support that guides them and helps them. Some young people do have post transition worries in secondary school. These relate to examinations, new learning regimes, friendships and bullying. If they were to go through the transition journey again, some young people would adopt a different approach to learning, have a more positive attitude to the transition journey and participate more in new school life.

In relation to advising others who are about to make the transition journey, the main message would be to enjoy it and not be scared. The majority of young people reported their transition journey as being a success. However, not all did. Two young people felt their transition journey did not go well. Some young people felt that there was more they have done themselves to make the transition a more positive experience for them. However, they also felt that a lot more could be done to support them along the way. Providing them with more information was highlighted here.

#### **4.3.14: Additional Findings**

My analysis of what the young people said about their transition experience indicated to me that young people are generally well able, through the medium of writing, to communicate descriptively their experiences of transition. However, certain aspects of the transition are less clear for them such as suggesting ways that they could be supported to a greater degree. In this research, it is noticeable that sharing around issues relating to the new school and what the new school can do differently can be a challenge for

young people. I wonder if this silence relates to an **inability** to express their voice or **a reluctance** to do so.

#### 4.3.3: Findings of Phase 2B - Semi-structured Interviews

**Research Question 3:** What factors during the transition journey do young people attribute to a decrease in their self-esteem levels?

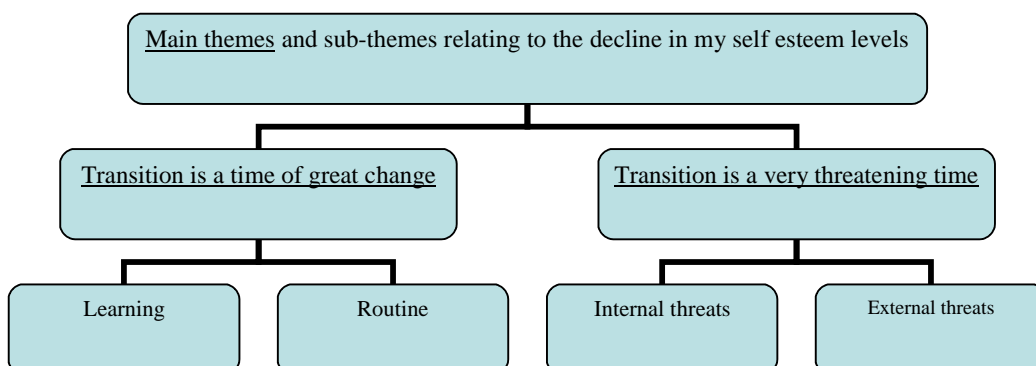
The semi-structured interviews, when analysed through the process of Thematic Analysis led to the development of two main themes. The development of these themes was as follows:

Table 8: Order Coding of Self-Esteem Decline Transcripts.

First Order Coding	An initial analysis of each of the four transcripts when viewed collectively highlighted a total of 36 initial labels.
Second Order Coding	These labels, when analysed and organised further led to the identification of seven second order codes.
Third Order Coding	Further analysis led to the identification of the final two main themes of :  <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>Transition is a time of great change.</u></li> <li>2. <u>Transition is a very threatening time.</u></li> </ol>

See Appendix 20 for an outline of development of the final themes. The final thematic map looks as follows:

Figure 14: Thematic Map Relating to Decline in Self-Esteem Levels



#### 4.4.1: Main Theme 1-Transition is a time of great change

The main theme of **transition is a time of great change** featured strongly in what the young people had to say about their transition related declines in self-esteem. It seems that the transition was characterised by lots of changes coming about at the same time. These changes may have been stressful for the young people and some may have experienced a difficulty in coping with so much change at this time. This main theme is characterised by two subordinate themes, these being changes in the new **learning** experiences they were expected to engage in the new school setting, and changes in their daily **routines**, both personal and institutional.

With regard to **learning**, young people made reference to the new and greater learning demands that they were now experiencing in secondary school. These demands were featured by more homework or lots of homework. For some young people it was a challenge that they now had to face the new reality of getting lots of homework at the weekends. The work was also perceived as much harder.

Along with facing new challenges in relation to increasing demands around learning, the young people spoke of the challenges of adapting to new **routines**, both in their personal lives as they go and come home from school

and in the new school routines. Some found this a challenge as is reflected in one young person's comment:

Anna: well...It wasn't that much of a difference, it was just getting up so early in the mornings was difficult because I live so far away and I had to get the bus at quarter to eight, so it was kind of difficult...another thing was getting back so late as I am very interested in horse riding, so getting back so late in the evenings it was too dark.

Another young person expressed a similar challenge in the manner in which he stated:

James: I was used to going to bed at a certain time and now I have to wake up a lot earlier...before I would be waking up around 9 or something as I lived right next to the school, now around quarter past seven.

In response to a question that invited James to reflect on the biggest and hardest change that he had experienced in the transition journey, he simply replied:

James: Waking up earlier.

In addition to the changes that the transition to secondary school brought into the personal lives and routines of some young people, the new changes that they encountered in the new daily school routine also posed challenging for some of the young people. Again for James there was some discomfort in now having to adapt to the challenges of:

James: a few different things like moving classes and finding rooms and things.

His experience was succinctly summed up in his comment that his transition experience of the new school was characterised by:

James: a good few changes.

For another young person, this new routine brought changes in routines and experiences that she had not experienced in the primary school setting. The new school setting was now a place that:

Sophie: is much bigger, longer day and has more teachers.

In terms of declines in self-esteem during the transition process, it is evident that some young people experienced some discomfort around adapting to the changes that they experienced along the way. Their experience of school until now has been that of a much smaller and more intimate family like setting. For some young people even getting to school now means getting up earlier and travelling further. It also means getting home later. Therefore, moving to a larger and more complex school setting entails much more than experiencing new learning experiences. The move brings a whole lot of other change with it and these changes may temporarily disrupt young some young people's lives in a way that takes time to get used to.

#### **4.4.2: Main Theme 2- Transition is a very threatening time**

Thus far, it is apparent that some of the changes that young people encounter can be challenging during the transition journey. However, along with these reported challenges, the young people also spoke of the fact that they faced another challenge during the transition journey; this being expressed in the main theme of **Transition can be a threatening time**. This can be interpreted to signify that the transition can further disrupt the life that so many young people have experienced to date. Some young people may experience this rapid and significant change in terms of the 'threat' that it now presents in their lives.

The main theme of transition as a threatening time was characterised by two subordinate themes, these being the **internal** threat as felt and reported by the young people and some **external** aspects of the new school system that they experienced as threatening.

In relation to internal threats and conflicts, some young people made reference to the negative feelings that arose for them during the transition process. Some experienced decreases in confidence levels. Some experienced new worries and anxieties along the way. One young person reported her overall feeling about the move to secondary school as:

Sophie: I really don't know, I remember I just didn't want to come in to secondary school at all.

Sophie's words are powerful here in terms of challenging us to think about the reasons why a young person might not want to make the transition to secondary school. It is a strong statement in terms of highlighting some of the fears, worries and anxieties that some young people have before the transition. It also highlights the fact that not all young people are positive about the move to secondary school. Some in fact might, I now believe, become school refusers if they are not supported and feel supported at this crucial time.

Another young person expressed the worry she felt in the new school setting. She commented that:

Anna: I get very nervous about simple class tests and things...I used to be shaking going into exams and people used to be telling me to stop worrying.

This young person went on to mention another worry:

Anna: worried that I'd lose contact with my friends.

This young person went on to explain that some of her worries stemmed from the fact that:

Anna: Well in primary school there was only six of us in my class and I seemed to be popular and I got on well with every body and now it's a bigger school and I'm more self conscious about myself and I'm always



trying to be better and as good as every one else. I'm always judging myself off other people but in primary school it was just a smaller group so in Sixth Class I was just one of the big girls that people looked up to because all the sixth class people looked up to you and then you're in First Year and nobody knows who you are anymore.

Anna says quite a lot here. From what she says, we can see the enormity of change that occurred when she made the transition to the secondary school. We notice that Anna left a very small primary school setting and this smallness ensured that she knew everybody and was comfortable there. It appears that in primary school, Anna was a big fish in a small pond, whereas in the new secondary school setting Anna now found herself to be a very small fish in a huge pond. Whereas, in the small primary school setting Anna appears to have experienced quite a high status in the pecking order, Anna now finds herself struggling to find herself in a new order. Transition as a step up and a step down (Hallinan & Hallinan, 1992) and a repositioning as the youngest (Pratt and George, 2005) can be difficult for young people. In response to this repositioning, Anna now has to change her behaviours and feels differently about herself.

In transition, young people can find themselves outside their comfort zones and facing many new "interpersonal tests" (Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell & Feidman, 1994, p. 507). It can take time for them to re-establish themselves, restructure their social roles (Seidman et al, 1994) and find a new comfort zone. This must certainly be an internal threat for some young people.

Commenting on the transition journey, another young person highlighted that for her the transition journey was a time in which she:

Sophie: really worried and now looking back I wouldn't get worried as there really is nothing to worry about.

Another young person spoke of this time of re-establishing one's self in the new order as a time of being a little scared of the new reality of finding himself:

James: In Sixth Class, I used to be head of the school because I was the oldest in the school. Now I am in First Year and there are people ahead of me in Sixth Year. I am not the head anymore.

The above comment once again captures the well documented idea that young people in Sixth Class can often feel like small fish in a big pond, whereas, after the move to secondary school they can suddenly feel like small fish in a much bigger pond. This notion may also be reflected in the following comment:

Sophie: I was away more confident as we had a small class, there was only nine in my class and now there's a huge class. We're still kind of getting used to it. Well, I am.

In relation to the internalisation of the many aspects of the transition that the young people experienced and encountered, it is true to say that these internal conflicts may have occurred in response to the many new **external** changes and threats that these young people were sensitive to in the transition process. As reported in this analysis, the young people appeared to be sensitive to such issues as new and bigger school, more teachers and people, more and harder work, etc. This internalisation and the ensuing stress it can create for young people draws attention to the need to empower and enable young people to deal more effectively with the potential stressors that they will encounter in the transition. It also highlights the need to explore supports that minimise the potential for threats and stressors arising at all.

In relation to what young people have to say around the issue of their reported decline in self esteem levels as they make the transition between primary and secondary school it is evident that some young peoples' voices paint a picture of transition being a lived reality of change and threats.

Although this insight is extremely valuable, I was surprised with how little the young people had to say or were willing to share about their experiences. The transcripts, that reflect that data gathering process and captured the young peoples' voices, are characterised by brief comments and monosyllabic

answers. The overall response patterns, I believe, do not provide as rich an insight, as I had initially anticipated, into what might be going on for these young people. In general, I believe that the “silence” that I referred to earlier, had a part to play in the research process that unfolded in this part of the research. A thorough exploration and possible explanation of the variables that were at play at this time will be provided at a later stage in this thesis.

#### **4.4.3: Findings in Relation to Research Question 3**

In answer to what factors young people attribute a decrease in their self-esteem levels during the transition journey, the following findings are evident:

The significant increase in learning demands was reported as challenging for some young people. This increase was characterised by more learning at home and in school and harder things to learn. Some young people found it a challenge to adapt to the changes that occur in their personal routines and also the dramatic change that took place in the new school routine. The transition was challenging in the manner in which aspects of it were a source of new internal and external threats to the self. Internal threats included anxiety, worry, loss of confidence, around such issues as friends and re-establishing themselves in the new pecking order. External threats were the things that were not going so well at the time.

#### **4.4.4: Additional Finding**

During this part of the research I had a sense that the young people’s voice was characterised by a shroud of silence as they reflected in the semi-structured interview setting on their transition experience. This is most interesting and will be addressed later.

<p><b>Research Question 4</b></p>
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<p>What factors during the transition journey do young people attribute to an increase in their self-esteem levels?</p>
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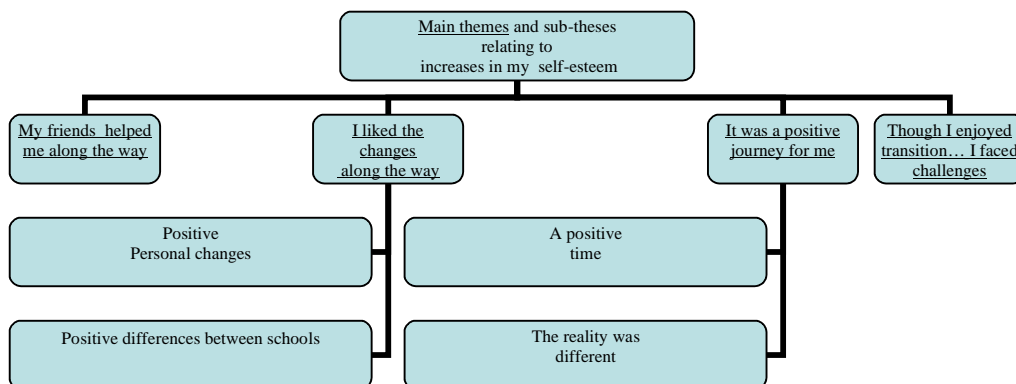
The semi-structured interviews when analysed using Thematic Analysis led to the identification of four main themes. The developmental process was as follows:

Table 9: Order Coding of Self-Esteem Increase Transcripts

First Order Coding	An initial analysis of each of the 10 transcripts, when viewed collectively, highlighted a total of 43 initial labels.
Second Order Coding	These labels, when analysed and organised further led to the identification of 6 second order codes.
Third Order Coding	Further analysis led to the identification of the final four main themes of :  <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>My friends helped me along the way.</u></li> <li>2. <u>I liked the changes along the way.</u></li> <li>3. <u>It was a positive journey for me.</u></li> <li>4. <u>Though I enjoyed transition...I faced challenges.</u></li> </ol>

(See Appendix 21 for development of themes relating to increases in self-esteem).

Figure 15: Thematic Map Relating to Increases in Self-Esteem Levels.



In this part of the research, I spoke with 10 young people, through the use of a semi-structured interview, with a view to listening to what they had to say around their reported transition related increase in self-esteem levels. A thematic analysis of the final 10 transcripts, provided an understanding of what they were saying in the format of four main themes, these being the themes of: **My friends helped me along the way, I liked the changes along the way, It was a positive journey for me and Though I enjoyed it I faced challenges.**

#### **4.4.5: Main Theme 1- My friends helped me along the way**

The importance of friends was a prominent feature of what every young person had to say. This is a common thread in the literature relating to friendships during transition (Pratt & George, 2005; Measor & Woods, 1984) and is significant in light of the fact that positive peer support during transition has a strong link with adolescent health (Hirsch & Debois, 1992). For these young people, the transition was positive in the manner in which it was made easier by knowing people and having some friends to be with on the first day and the initial settling period. This is evident in the comment:

Mary: During the summer we had a football course and we all got to know each other so it wasn't like going into other classes where I only know one or two people. I actually know them all so that was good.

Another young person's comment shows the cushioning effect that having friends can have as young people make that initial and sometimes daunting step into the new school setting:

Moira: Well, when we got separated into classes and there were four more people from my old school, I knew then that it would be easier to make other friends.

For another young person the transition was made all the more positive by the fact that:

Pat: I knew people coming with me.

In preparing for the transition, it seems that young people can feel more at ease if they get to know some of their perspective peers before they actually start in the new secondary school. This can be important in lessening some transition anxieties and enabling young people to feel better about the impending transition.

The transition to the new school was also positive in the way that one could still have their old friends but held the potential for meeting lots of new people and making new friends. This is mirrored in one young person's response to the question of:

Researcher: What are the things you enjoyed about it?

Breeda: My friends... I got to know many friends.

Friends and having peers to interact with was also a great strength in helping young people feel better about the new aspects of life in the new school that they were concerned about. One young person described her pre-transition feeling that she would find herself isolated and feeling alone in the new school. She attributed this to the fact that she felt that people meet new people through activities like sport. However, because she reported herself as not being sporty, being alone and lonely in the future was a potential fear for her. However, all of this was made better by having a few friends as is evident in what she had to say:

Mary: When I came in first, we had no lockers and things like that. When you are in First Year you can't go up to the shops so we didn't know what to do. I found that very boring because we used to just stand around. It was alright for the people who knew each other from football and other things but I'm not very sporty and yeah they had a lot to talk about. But me and my three or four friends used to just stand there. So then we got lockers and then we used to all go to each others lockers and that got a load of time wasted and then we started going for just a walk around the yard and things got much easier...if you have five friends and they are all absent one day you will be alone. So try and make as much friends as you can.

A very clear and concise observation as voiced by one young person speaks volumes in relation to the power of friends and friendships:

Conor: Friends being friends.

Friends just being friends can be a big help in the transition from primary to secondary school. Friends can help increase a young person's confidence. This was important for Emer who stated:

Emer: I gained a lot of confidence because I met more people and I made more friends and stuff.

Friends can make the transition a positive experience for young people as illustrated in the comment:

Una: You have a good time when you come here, First Year is easy and you make a lot of friends and there is no need to be worried.

Friends were also seen as a great way of making new friends and increasing and strengthening one's social network and sense of belonging in school. Although it may be difficult sometimes it is useful to remember that:

Moira: It might have been hard at first to make friends but once you had people from your own class to sit with, then if they would be mixing, you would be mixing too.

In conclusion, the importance and power of friends can be seen in one young persons' experience of transition:

Ann: I thought it was fine, I'd prefer this school to primary school, more friends.

Along with the importance and power of friendships and the drive to maintain old friendships and seek out new ones, these young people spoke of the positive impact that 'change' played in their experience of the transition. They

also spoke of the important role that change played in the increase in self esteem levels during the transition journey. Whereas, some young people spoke of the challenges that change brought them in relation to declines in self esteem levels, it is evident that other young people who experienced increases in self esteem levels, welcomed change and saw it as a positive element of their transition journey.

#### **4.4.6: Main Theme 2- I liked the changes along the way**

In this instance, the main theme of change is characterised in two ways: the subordinate themes of transition as a time of **positive personal change** and transition as a time where some young people experience what they perceive as **positive differences between schools**.

In terms of transition as experienced as a time of **positive personal change**, the young people spoke of transition as a time of growth and moving on. For some it is simply a time to go.

One young person experienced the transition between primary school as a time when:

Breeda: I'm changing. I'm getting older and I'm not that young anymore. I can see things better now.

Another young person echoed this sentiment in his assertion that:

Jack: It was time to move on...I had to move on as I'm getting older and becoming more grown up like.

In commenting on what advice she would give to other young people, another young person made reference to transition as a time of growth. She explained the transition from primary to secondary school as a time when:

Breeda: You are changing, you are gonna change, your personality will change...you will get more mature.



For another young person growth was expressed in his assertion that:

Shaun: You will learn to find your own way.

These extracts explain transition as a positive time of change and growth in many young people's lives. It can be a move that they are ready for and a time to move on. Feeling this way can have a very positive impact on how young people make the transition and this positive attitude is an aspect of transition that needs to be acknowledged and capitalised upon and brought forward into the new school setting if possible.

In addition to transition as a time of growth and positive personal change, these young people also highlighted the fact that many of them liked the changes along the way. Some young people spoke of the positive aspects of the **differences between schools**. On the whole the young people spoke of the positive aspects of having more and different teachers, lots more classes and subjects and having to change classes, in a bigger school where a young person could do more and different activities. Whereas some young people may perceive such dramatic changes as potential threats and sources of stress, these young people welcomed and embraced these changes and saw them as a positive aspect of the move from primary to secondary school.

#### **4.4.7: Main Theme 3 – It was a positive journey for me**

In relation to this main theme, some young people were fortunate to experience the transition journey as simply being a **positive journey for me**. This main theme is made up of two sub-themes, these being: **A positive time** and **The reality was different**.

In relation to transition being a **positive journey for me**, a sizeable number of the young people, in this instance, used positive language to describe their transition experience. It was remembered as:

Mary: an easy time...everyone was very nice.

Breeda: I love it.

Shaun: It is fun here.

Emer: Everything went fine.

Ann: I thought it was fine.

Una: It's fine...it's grand out...It was good...I'm pleased with everything.

Although young people may have different experiences and perceptions of the transition journey, one variable that was explicitly referred to but not expanded upon by six of the young people was the role of the teacher. It seems to be a positive experience if young people come into contact with teachers that they experience or perceive as being “nice”.

The difference between these young peoples' pre-transition notions of what the new school will be like and the actual post-transition reality they experience is an important factor to be considered here. Jindal-Snape and Foggie (2008) highlighted the fact that for some young people the transition to secondary school is not as bad as they had been led to believe. In relation to the fact that **the reality was different**, it is evident that some of the young people in this research, whilst in primary school, heard things and horror stories (Delamont, 1991) about secondary school and then went away and constructed an “institutionally defined image” (Pratt and George, 2008, p. 21) of what the new school was going to be like. Based on handed-down stories and popular myths from peers, some young people formulated their own ideas and expectations of what life in the new school would be like. One young person actually referred to the notion of “myths”. This is prevalent in the literature relating to young peoples' experience of transition. Her experience and the advice she would give to younger people is as follows:

Mary: I wouldn't be so nervous cos there's like a myth of the sixth years bullying and all this kind of thing. They were perfectly fine....it's just that you expect different things actually never happen.

She went on further to explain that:

Mary: We used to hear that sixth year and fifth years would pick on you, older children, but they are very nice.

For another young person we can see that what she thought about the school wasn't at all true when she actually became part of the new school. As she says:

Moira: I thought that the school would be huge but it wasn't...its actually quite small when you get to know the place.

The difference between the expected and the reality can sometimes be a challenge in the way that the expected can evoke negative feelings. For another young person this is apparent in her comment provided below:

Breeda: When I was in Sixth Class I was kind of scared going in because I thought I wouldn't know a lot of people. But then when I went in it was great.

As young people prepare for the transition, they can have false assumptions about what life in the new setting will be like. They hear different stories and can build a picture in their heads of the new secondary school being a harsh place to survive in. If they were given accurate information from the beginning, it might lessen the possibility of young people developing a negative attitude to secondary school even before they begin. It might also lessen their anxiety levels and equip them with the skills and confidence to begin life in the new secondary school setting on a more positive note.

#### **4.4.8: Main Theme 4- Though I enjoyed the transition...I faced challenges**

Although these young people were commenting on their transition experience and some aspects of that journey that may have contributed to an increase in their self-esteem, it is important to acknowledge that they were not immune from also experiencing challenges along the way. This is evident in the manner in which some young people reported experiences that constitute the theme of **although I enjoyed the journey... I faced challenges** along the

way. All of the young people spoke of challenges they encountered along the way. These challenges were similar to those expressed by the young people who experienced a decrease in self esteem levels and had to do with changes in the old and new school systems, harder and more work, more subjects, fears and anxieties relating to possibility of getting lost and loosing old friends, school being boring now with not a lot to do there. The possibility of getting into trouble was also mentioned. Thus, it is apparent that although the overall transition experience can be positive, most young people experience some minor challenges along the way.

Once again, in this phase of the research process, I was surprised at and interested in how little the young people had to say or were willing to share about their experiences. On this occasion again, I feel that the transcripts that reflect that data gathering process and captured the young peoples voices are characterised by brief comments and at times monosyllabic answers. I feel that the information gathered does not provide as rich an insight into what might be going on for these young people as I had expected. In general, I believe that this “silence” had a part to play in the research process that unfolded in this part of the research. A thorough exploration and possible explanation of the variables that were at play at this time will be provided at a later stage in this thesis.

#### **4.4.9: Findings in Relation to Research Question 4**

In answer to what factors young people attribute an increase in their self-esteem levels during the transition journey, the following findings were evident:

‘Friends’ were reported as having a very strong bearing on how some young people experience the transition between primary and secondary school. Embracing change and experiencing the transition as a time of positive personal change can lead to increases in self esteem levels especially when the transition is framed as a time of growth. Some young people experienced the transition as a positive time in their lives with the reality they experienced

being very different to the pre-transition picture that they has created. Horror stories and myths played a part in this sometimes. Although some young people did experience the journey as positive overall, they did experience challenges along the way. These challenges included fears and worries about the changes they were living through.

#### **4.4.10: Additional Finding**

Once again, I had a sense that the young peoples' voices were characterised by a 'silence' as they reflected in the semi-structured interview setting on their transition experience. This is interesting and will be addressed later.

### **4.5: Findings: Phase 3**

This phase of the research aimed to gain an insight into primary and secondary school teachers' transition experience. In the case of the primary school teachers, semi-structured interviews were used whereas with the secondary school teachers, focus groups were the chosen method. Findings are as follows:

#### **4.5.1: Findings of Primary School Teacher Interviews-Phase 3A**

**Research Question 5:** What do primary school teachers tell us about their experiences of working with young people who make the transition from primary to secondary school?

In phase 3A of this research, I listened to the voices of primary school teachers who work with young people. Their thoughts feeling and perceptions were explored through the use of semi-structured interviews. A total of eight teachers, all female, participated in this exploration. The wealth of rich data that is apparent has much to offer in terms of building a greater understanding of what happens in a holistic sense around transition as young people are

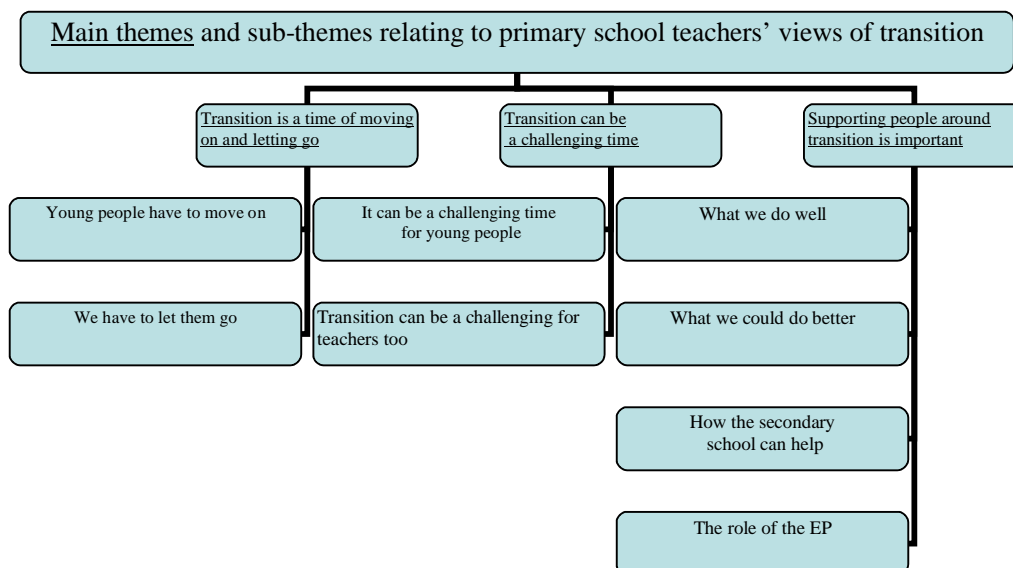
ready to make the move to secondary school. The final eight transcripts were analysed by means of thematic analysis. The coding process was as follows:

Table 10: Order Coding of Primary School Teacher Transcripts.

First Order Coding	An initial analysis of each of the 8 transcripts when viewed collectively highlighted a total of 163 initial labels.
Second Order Coding	These labels, when analysed and organised further led to the identification of 10 second order codes.
Third Order Coding	Further analysis led to the identification of the final 3 main themes of : <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>Transition is a time of moving on and letting go.</u></li> <li>2. <u>Transition can be a challenging time.</u></li> <li>3. <u>Supporting people around transition is important.</u></li> </ol>

Three main themes were identified in relation to what primary school teachers say about the transition from primary to secondary school. These main themes are as follows: **Transition is a time of moving on and letting go**, **Transition can be a challenging time** and **Supporting people in transition is important**. A visual thematic map of what primary teachers had to say is presented below (See Appendix 22 for development of themes relating to primary teachers' views of transition).

Figure 16: Thematic Map Relating to Primary School Teachers' Views.



#### **4.5.1.1: Main Theme 1- Transition is a time of moving on and letting go**

This main theme gives a general overview and insight into what the transition journey to secondary school looks like from the primary school side of the bridge and contains the two subordinate themes of: **Young people have to move on** and **We have to let them go**.

In relation to the fact that **young people have to move on**, the primary schools teachers reported their sense that the transition from primary to secondary school is a very positive time for young people. It is interesting that all of the teachers referred to the young people as “children” or “child”. This is interesting in the way that it gives us an insight into way primary school teachers view the young people they work with. They view them as children who require lots of support and understanding.

In what the teachers had to say and in the manner in which they talked of transition, there was a real sense that transition is a journey and not an isolated single event. This is evident in the time lines that teachers perhaps unwittingly weaved into their account of the transition stories. Along with viewing the transition process as a journey which starts in Sixth and sometimes Fifth Class, a lot of teachers acknowledged the importance of this time in referring to the transition as “massive “, “major change”, “huge”. All teachers reported that the final few months in primary school is a time where young people are excited about the change and are ready to move on. The young people also see this time as a time of growth and positive personal change. A comment that captures the positivity of the young people at this time is evident in the way that one teacher reflected that:

Alice: I often find that by this time they are ready to go. Like, I think from Easter on, most of them, I know you will have the exception, but most of them are very excited about it and think that it is time for them to move on.

This view is further reinforced in what another teacher had to say:

Niamh: It is kind of a time for them when they feel they are growing up. It is an exciting time for them. They feel they are leaving primary school behind. I think they feel they are going to have much more freedom. I think a lot of them go with a very positive idea of what their experience is going to be like.

This overall sense of moving on, growing and excitement was also echoed in what other teachers had to say:

Martha: Usually I find by the time they finish Sixth Class they are ready to go.

Niamh: They are very excited about it and they are definitely looking forward to it. By Sixth Class they are well ready to leave primary school behind them.

Helen: They are ready to move on and need to move on. They are excited about growing up and moving out into the wider world. It is all about new things, new friends and a fresh start perhaps for some of them.

Sarah: They can't wait. They can't wait. So I think that's fantastic. I don't know any child that ever has gone into secondary school and not wanted to go to secondary school. They see it as a very positive time and they just see it as "Oh my god" you know. They are just getting on with life and that's it. They can't wait. Some of them are ready to leave us well before they actually leave us, because they want to, because they're just done with us.

These extracts might indicate the progression, natural flow and rhythm of life that we expect for young people as they grow and develop. It appears that transition to secondary school is almost like an unmentioned and yet important developmental milestone that needs to be realised in a young person's life. A time comes when it has to happen and the mere fact that it is happening signifies positive growth and development.

In addition to seeing the transition journey as a very positive time for young people, all teachers viewed this time as a predominantly positive time and process in general. Primary school staff were of the opinion that even though there are things that could be better, each year the transition process in a



generic sense is “working” with some aspects “working out pretty well”. For one teacher this was reflected in her assertion that:

Niamh: Yeah, I’d say it is working. The proof is there in terms of the children who have gone up in previous years.

While all the teachers experienced some challenges in relation to transition, they reported that they were predominantly happy with the yearly process that took place around transition in their particular area. There was an overwhelming sense, in what every teacher had to say, that the young person who was leaving the primary school was very well known by their teachers but that the time had come when **we have to let them go**. Along with being well known as individuals, it was also reported that they were well known as individuals who exist with the context of a family. The family ethos that young people experience in primary school is an important aspect to their early school experiences (Shaw, 1995). This aspect of primary school life was regarded as vitally important by all of the teachers. In a way, there was a reported sense that this cannot or does not happen in the new secondary school setting. This is mirrored in what one teacher had to say:

Alice: I suppose they are coming from a school like this, where every teacher knows them. The resource teacher knows them, everything about them. You know, they go to secondary, they are going from teacher to teacher, and they are going from class to class. Obviously, some reference will have gone with them, but I mean they are not really going to know what their needs are, what their background is. I mean that sometimes it is relevant, you know, what they are dealing with at home...what’s going on.

This knowing the young person and knowing their family context can lead to “security” for the young people and allows a special bond to develop. This was evident in:

Niamh: There is a better chance of building up a bond. I think the teacher gets to know the child better, they get to know more of the family background so I think therefore if teachers have a better understanding of where the child is coming from it might kind of

help too...they have a better understanding of what difficulties they have to deal with in their everyday lives.

Words like “comfort”, “comfort zone”, “security”, “cocoon”, “big family”, “close knit class” were used to describe the primary school setting that these young people move away from. However, in listening to what the teachers had to say about the young peoples’ primary school experience, a picture emerged that showed young people in a school setting where an awful lot was done for them. Teachers reported working with young people in a highly supportive, “caring” and “personalised” way and in a way that is characterised by “spoon feeding”, “mammied”, “hounded”, “protected and babied”, “molly coddled”, “we really do too much” and in a way that tends to respond to the view of the young person as a person who “needs to be looked after”. It was apparent that some teachers had a perception that the young people would not be treated this way in the new secondary school setting. Some teachers felt that the young people would be expected to grow up and become more independent. This was regarded as positive in some instances but worries remained as to whether the transition could lead to a situation where the young people now have to:

Martha: Paddle their own canoe.

and

Alice: they have to fight for themselves a lot of the time.

All teachers recognised friends and parents as being a potentially wonderful and valuable strength and resource for young people as they embarked on the transition journey. Friends were recognised as being vital in the initial stages of the journey in the manner in which young people don’t have to start the journey alone. The power of positive friendships, connections and a sense of belonging were also recognised as protective factors as young people moved out of the transition and settled into secondary school life. Parental support was also valued by all of the teachers.

Although, the primary school teachers spoke of the transition from primary to secondary school as a crucial time in a young person's life and regarded the transition as a move from a very caring and highly supportive environment, an interesting thread existed in what some teachers had to say about the process under investigation here. There was a hint that transition was simply something that the young people had to go through, a fact of life that just happened each year and maybe sometimes too much of a fuss was made about it. This view of the transition process was evident in:

Helen: Well, I suppose the reality every year is that it just happens without too much planning or too much thought going into it...we just expect that it will just happen and go smoothly...that really funny as that is exactly what happens.

Sarah: There is no way of getting around it. I think they have this time that they just have to go through.

Grace: I feel that sometimes there is too much made of it...I mean it's a fact of life.

Fundamentally, I agree with what Helen, Sarah and Grace had to say. I believe that there comes a time in a young person's life where they simply have to move on and go. Moving on is positive. However, 'rather than making too much of it', I do believe that young people need support as they make the transition from primary to secondary school. Just because it is supposed to happen at a particular time and has to happen at a particular time does not mean that it should be left to unfold in an ad hoc and haphazard way. If young people are to benefit holistically from the transition, then it needs to be planned for and managed in a way that ensures the best possible outcomes for young people.

#### **4.5.1.2: Main Theme 2- Transition can be a challenging time**

This theme explored what primary teachers had to say around the theme of transition from primary to secondary school as being a challenging time. However, it is interesting that this theme is concerned not only with the fact

**that transition can be as a challenging time for young people but it can a challenging time for teachers too.**

### **Transition can be a challenging time for young people**

From what the teachers had to say about the transition between primary and secondary school, it was evident that they were very much in tune with and sensitive to the real life transition issues and challenges that young people reported. All teachers made references to everyday issues like lockers, timetables, harder and more work, friends, finding one's way around, etc. These are issues that some people might consider small, insignificant and trivial. I would have done so at one stage. However, these are the real things that young people reported as finding difficult at the beginning of their secondary school life. One teacher's sensitivity to what goes on for young people was evident when she said:

Grace: I suppose the long day is the first part. In primary school they have lots of freedom and lots of playtime, you know for their breaks. They have two breaks and they go out and they do lots of activities. I think when it comes to secondary school; they tend to miss out a lot. They can miss the kicking of the football and that sort of thing...and certainly the long day because again, living in a rural area, the children might be gone from eight o' clock in the morning and they are not back until half-past-four.

Although the teachers were aware that the transition to secondary can be challenging for some young people, I found it enlightening and illuminating to realise that the transition can also be a challenging time for them. This is an aspect of transition that I had not thought about to any great degree. This new realisation added another dimension to the way that I looked at the transition process. It also added more meaning to my understanding of the part I have to play in ensuring more favourable transition outcomes for all.

### **It can be a challenging time for teachers too**

For the teachers themselves, a major challenge was evident in what they all had to say about missing young people that they have gotten to know so well.

They can experience worry, wonder and anxiety about the young people who are moving on. One teacher stated:

Nora: Yes, I do worry about them when they are moving on to secondary school.

Another teacher gave an insight into the worry she feels in her comment that:

Alice: With the kids I deal with, I would just be worried you know, you'd like to know exactly what support they get when they move on...I suppose it would kind of concern you that maybe when they get there that they are kind of just dropped in it.

Another teacher echoed these sentiments:

Helen: I tend to get to know the kids very well and it can be hard to let them go. I worry that they'll do and be OK. I wonder if they'll cope with the huge changes and make new friends. It can be a complex process with all they have to adjust to.

Another teacher stated simply that:

Chris: Even for the teacher as well, you'll miss some children.

These extracts echo earlier references to young people being "mammied" by their primary school teachers. It appears that strong attachments can develop between young people and their teachers in the primary school setting. This is understandable when we consider that the majority of young people start primary school at the age of five and spend the next eight years growing and developing under the care and guidance of their teachers. Therefore, it is reasonable, that for many teachers and the young people, the transition marks the end of this intense and deep relationship and heralds a time of temporary sense of loss, sorrow and worry. However, even though the relinquishing of strong attachments to primary school may be a source of sadness for young people, it is important that its take place; as the stress of transition can become more intense if young people fail to do so (Cotterel,

1996). Lucey and Reay (2000) also see this sense of loss as being an integral part of the process of change.

An added difficulty in terms of teacher loss, worry and anxiety may lie in the fact that all teachers spoke of the lack of feedback they feel they receive once the young people have left. It is almost as if the young people disappear into a vacuum with many primary school teachers finding themselves in a post transition situation each year where they are trying to find out informally (through speaking to the young people themselves or speaking to parents, siblings and friends of the young people) how the young people are getting on.

One teacher expressed her need for what she called 'follow up' when she stated:

Martha: You would like to, I suppose to just basically know, get follow up, and know how they are getting on.

Another teacher's experience was:

Nora: As to how they get on when they go to secondary school, we don't get an awful lot of feedback. You know, we might meet some of the children if they have younger brothers or sisters, we'd meet them in the school or you might meet them in the shop and you'll ask them how they are getting on.

Another teacher expressed her similar experience of liking to know but not knowing how the young people are getting on:

Helen: It's a pity but we never actually get any feedback as to how they are getting on but we do hear back if they have brothers or sisters in school...it would be great if we could hear how things are going sometime.

This lack of 'follow on' may be important for teachers in terms of providing closure to the transition process for them. In a way I believe that their sense of loss and anxiety may be prolonged if they are left to wonder how the young

people they have known so well are now getting on. This is an important piece of information for the secondary school.

In addition to experiencing challenges around letting young people go, worrying about them and wanting to know how they are getting on, six of the eight teachers alluded to the transition as an opportunity for young people to have a fresh start or a chance to start again with a clean slate. However, this seems to be challenging in itself as these teachers seemed to experience conflict around the notion of follow on or fresh start. It is evident that the teachers would like some follow on and some fresh start. They would welcome some follow on in terms of information. However, worries persisted around giving the secondary school too much follow on of information as they felt that it may end in the inappropriate formulation of a negative label and give the secondary school a preconceived inaccurate notion of a young person. These teachers invest a lot of time, energy and care into the young people. Although they would like the same level of support to follow on, some experience conflicting emotions in that they are fearful and afraid that this is not the case. The above is evident in one teacher's assertion that:

Alice: I think they can kind of go in with a label or a tag. And you try, you know, you wouldn't give too much information, you know because you want to try and give every child a clean slate but I have seen situations where they've gone in and I think the school is nearly waiting for them...I think it is important that every child goes but I don't think that any child should be going in with baggage. You know what has happened in primary school has happened and you know let them have a fresh start and see what happens.

I'm not convinced that we do a young person any justice by with-holding important pieces of information relating to their presentation in primary school. However, I feel that all information needs to be presented in a balanced way that acknowledges every young person as an individual who brings their own strengths and areas of need into the new school system. Through getting to know a young person so well, primary school teachers have a wealth of knowledge and experience. This can be very valuable in enabling the secondary school to carry on supporting young people. However, the

information needs to be passed on in a very sensitive and organised manner. It needs to be done so in a way that maintains the dignity of every young person and helps rather than hinders their on-going development.

#### **4.5.1.3: Theme 3- Supporting people around transition is important**

In relation to support, the following four sub-themes were identified. These being: **what we do well, what we could do better, how the secondary school can help and the role of the EP.**

##### **What we do well**

In reference to what primary teachers felt they do well as they support young people around transition, it was evident that the teachers tried to “prepare” the young people as best they could. Along with getting to know the young person very well, all teachers stressed the high level of support they felt the young people experienced and received in primary school.

In terms of preparing young people for the transition, two main frameworks were apparent. These frameworks included transition specific teaching and learning and incidental learning around transition. In general, all teachers teach and work with young people around transition specific areas of need. The basis for this learning springs from what the young people report they need to learn about and from specific questions they ask about the transition. The teachers’ views and past experiences of the transition process also feed into what is taught and learned. Specific programmes relating to transition were sometimes reported as a valuable teaching and learning tool.

In addition to teaching and learning based on transition specific issues, it is apparent that teaching and learning also takes place that can be related to transition but not exclusively specific to it. It is almost like a hidden curriculum around transition that unwittingly has an empowering effect for young people in the way in which it affords them opportunities to acquire new skills and



knowledge that will help them at a later stage as they move into, through and out of the transition journey.

In relation to supporting the young people around the impending transition, the teachers expressed their sense that that they also have positive relationships with parents and families and use this important resource at this crucial time.

### **What we could do better**

In relation to what they could do better, it was apparent from what the teachers had to say that although they felt that they prepared the young people for the transition as best they could, they could do better at reaching out to open the lines of communication with the secondary school. However, there was an interesting aspect to this in the manner in which one teacher felt that the communication should be initiated from the secondary school side as the young people are moving on to there after all:

Sarah: They are going to secondary school so we can't be taking the lead I guess because I guess it's like yeah that we're finishing up.

It is also interesting to note that although the primary school teachers spoke of the high level support in terms of spoon feeding, mammying etc, they sometimes talked in a manner that indicated to me that they actually felt that they may have been disabling or disempowering the young people instead of making them more independent and expecting them to take greater responsibility for themselves:

Helen: We really do too much from them here and sometimes they are not able to look after themselves when they go into the larger and more complex school environment...they need to be more independent and start doing things for themselves. Nobody in secondary school really cares if you do your homework and they don't spoon feed you. It is sink or swim really.

Overall, from what the primary school teachers had to say about the ways in which they strive to support the overall transition from primary to secondary school process, it was evident that each of the 8 primary schools work in isolation and that each school has developed its own way of addressing transition each year. Though every teacher reported formal and informal established practice that takes place in their school, it was apparent that the opportunity for reflection that the semi structured interviews afforded the teachers gave them a chance to speak about their own experiences as teachers of transition rather than reflect as teachers on specific policies and formal arrangements that exist in their schools. At no time was a specific policy or method of standard practice referred to by any of the teachers. Thus, it appears that the transition process in each of the primary school unfolds in a very ad hoc basis each year. This ad hoc approach may also indicate a heavily reactive approach rather than a more preventative and holistic approach to supporting young people around the impending transition.

### **How the secondary school can help**

Primary school teachers spoke positively about current structures that are in place. They value the established initiatives that take place yearly like the induction day, night for parents, secondary school teacher visiting the primary school to gather information. However, they also talked of additional support that they need from the secondary school if the transition process is to have more favourable outcomes for everybody.

It was all about communication when the primary school staff reflected on what they feel the secondary school could do to better support every one around transition. In terms of communication, the primary school teachers would wholeheartedly welcome more communication, information, collaboration and feedback from the secondary school.

In relation to information, some primary school staff felt they need more information about the secondary school and what life is like there. They feel they need this information so they can develop an overall accurate picture of

the secondary school, firstly as a place with new routines, systems etc, and secondly as a dynamic system that expects young people to behave in a certain way if they are to reach their full potential. This knowledge, some felt, would allow them to teach for transition in a relevant and specific way. They would also like more information so they could answer the many questions that parents and the young people themselves asked along the way.

In terms of communication, the primary school teachers made reference to their desire to have both formal and informal opportunities to liaise with their secondary school counterparts. The formal opportunities, some of which are already in place, would take the format of school visits, meetings, etc. More informal opportunities for communication would allow teachers to pick up the phone at any time to discuss areas of concern.

The way the primary school teachers spoke of the secondary school was characterised by a strong perception that that secondary school system does not provide a continuation of the high level of support and care that the young person was afforded in the primary school setting. This mistrust leaves the primary school teachers with a sense that the young people, having made the transition, now find themselves in an environment that is less supportive and less understanding of them as individuals and learners. In a manner, primary school staff had a wish that the secondary school would continue to interact with young people in a way that ensures continuity in the high level of support that the young people have become accustomed to in primary school. This was illustrated in the following quotes:

Alice: They don't always get the same support as they do here...their needs aren't looked after as much and I think it has got the potential for them to fall behind very quickly.

Chris: I suppose we are very much a caring school. The primary school side of things is very much caring whereas the secondary school there's more pressure and there is more of a need to children to progress and achieve in their subject areas so there's a little less of the caring side and it is more subject focused and achievement focused...you know so obviously when they go to secondary school, there's obviously a lapse where they don't receive any support

and I don't know. I feel myself if they could be supported from the very start it might be a better help to them. And ease things a little bit more for them.

Martha: Even though we put in a lot of work on the primary side, sometimes you'd feel that that work is lost because of the lack of pick up on the other side or the lack on the other side when they are starting off.

Teachers communicated their sense that the young people, that they have known so well and done so much for, move into a different system that has a different view to them and expects them to behave in a completely different way. This jump can be very significant in the manner in which it is done:

Martha: Sure they are just expected to be more mature and more adult and you'd be hoping that they I suppose realise, you know that they are going into First Year and it's getting a bit more serious kind of thing.

Helen: They are treated much more in an adult way. I don't know if they are ready for it or not.

The above extracts may offer an insight into the negative image of the secondary school that some teachers have. Are young people the only group that fall victim to "myths" and "horror stories" or are their perceptions actually correct? My sense is that the lack of support in terms of 'follow on' that some primary teachers talk about may be leaving them in a void. In an attempt to rationalise how they are feeling, I believe that negativity towards the secondary school may prevail.

### **The role of the EP**

The primary school teachers saw the educational psychologist has having an important role to play in supporting the transition of young people from primary to secondary school. This role related mainly to the fact that the EP has knowledge and experience of both sides of the bridge and is therefore in a favourable position to support the young person as they cross the bridge and act as a bridge between the two systems. The EP was seen as a means

of ensuring continuity and was also seen as a valuable support in providing information about transition, sharing information about specific young people and monitoring progress on the other side. At times, it can be positive just knowing that the EP is available at any time in a consultative way that supports the process:

Grace: I suppose you know, it is fortunate here that in the secondary school, we have the same psychologist working in the secondary school so there's great continuity and I think that this continuity is probably a big thing and that information is easily transferred and moved around.

Niamh: Well, the biggest thing from my point of view would be that the educational psychologist is there, which they are. I mean in terms of being able to support the staff, the recommendations, to be able to kind of follow up on or to suggest resources that can be used which you know, I feel I can ring at any time and get that input from you.

Nora: Well, basically, from my point of view it's that you are on the other end of the phone and I can ring you if I have a question.

Helen: The EP has one foot in each camp and can pass on information between the two schools. In a different way, the EP can facilitate discussion and exploration of any issues that are arising from children. I hope that the EP can be a person on the other side who can look after someone and make life easier for them. It would be great to hear how things are going sometimes.

The main message here is that schools value the fact that the EP is available to support them and work with them in a consultative way whenever they feel the need. However, as an EP, I consider much of what the teachers see as helpful as being aspects of their role that they need to develop themselves and take responsibility for. This is an instance where a framework for practice could be useful.

#### **4.5.1.4: Findings in Relation to Research Question 5**

In answer to what do primary school teachers tell us about their experiences of working with young people who make the transition from primary to secondary school the following is evident:

Primary school teachers acknowledged that the transition from the primary to the secondary school is a crucial time in a young person's life. It is a process that takes place over time and can be a very positive time for some young people. Primary school teachers were very in tune with the potential challenges that the young people could encounter along the way. Some primary school teachers reported that although the yearly process works well, certain things could be done better. Some primary school teachers can find it hard to let go of the young people they have gotten to know so well and have done so much for. In the process of letting go, some teachers can experience anxiety and concern around the transition process. The primary school teachers reported that they give a high level of support to young people as they move into the transition. Never the less they were honest in their disclosure that there are some things that they could do better. Some primary school teachers would welcome more communication with and from the secondary school. They would like more information in a generic sense and would welcome more formal and informal ways of liaising with their secondary school counterparts. The EP was seen to have an important role to play in supporting the transition process.

#### **4.5.1.5: Additional Findings**

Primary school teachers had a perception that the secondary school setting doesn't afford young people the opportunity to experience the same high level of support that they became accustomed to in the primary school setting. It appears that a sense of mistrust amongst some primary school teachers prevails.

#### **4.5.2: Findings of Secondary School Teacher Focus Groups-Phase 3B**

##### **Research Question 6**

What do secondary school teachers tell us about their experiences of working with young people who make the transition from primary to secondary school?

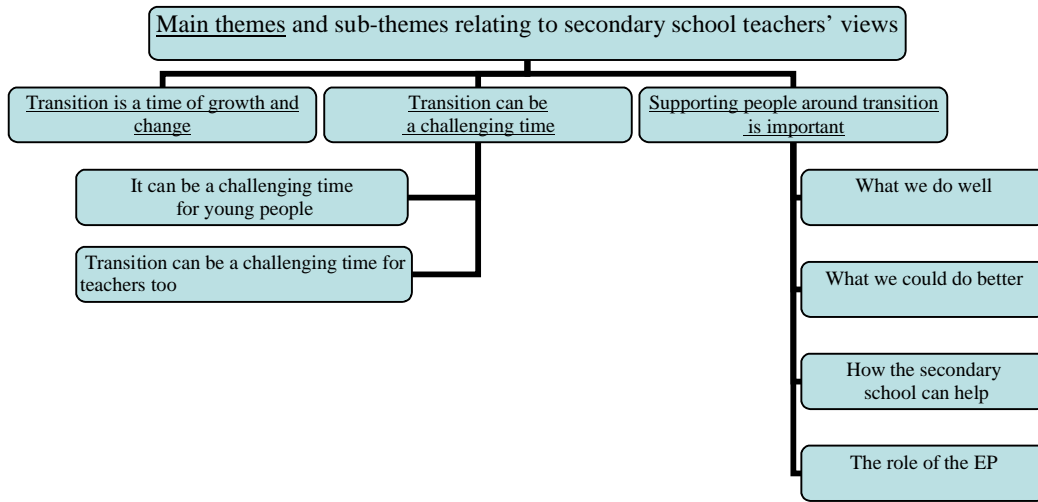
In phase 3B of this research, the voices of some of the teachers who work with young people in secondary school were listened to. Their thoughts feeling and perceptions were explored through the use of focus groups. A total of seven teachers in two groups, one group of four and one group of three, participated in this exploration. The rich data that is apparent has much to offer in terms of building a greater understanding of what happens in a holistic sense around transition as young people are ready to make the move to secondary school. The transcripts were analysed by means of a thematic analysis. This process highlighted three main themes in relation to what secondary school teachers say about the transition from primary to secondary school. An outline of the coding process is as follows:

Table 11: Order Coding of Secondary School Teacher Transcripts

First Order Coding	An initial analysis of each of the two transcripts when viewed collectively highlighted a total of 44 initial labels.
Second Order Coding	These labels, when analysed and organised further led to the identification of eight second order codes.
Third Order Coding	Further analysis led to the identification of the final three main themes of : <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>Transition is a time of growth and change</u></li> <li>2. <u>Transition can be a challenging time</u></li> <li>3. <u>Supporting people around transition is important.</u></li> </ol>

These three main themes are as follows: Transition is a positive time for the majority of young people, **Transition can be a challenging time and supporting people around transition is important.** A thematic map of what secondary school teachers had to say is presented below (See Appendix 23 for development of themes relating to secondary school teachers' views on transition).

Figure 17: Thematic Map Relating to Secondary School Teacher Views



#### 4.5.2.1: Main Theme 1: Transition is a time of change and growth

Secondary school teachers reported that although not all of the young people make a successful transition between primary and secondary school, a sizeable majority do “cope well” and are positive about the move and actually “look forward to it”. This echoed the views of the primary school teachers and indicates that both primary and secondary school teachers think that most young people make a smooth transition, but not all. Some possible reasons for the fact that some young people might find the transition difficult was immediately apparent and well captured in this teacher’s observation of the massive changes that young people have to confront during their transition journey:

Aine: I think they cope well generally speaking, the majority cope well. There are exceptions. There are problems for some of them and in the big school where we have over 500 hundred students, most of them come in from national schools where there are small schools generally, the whole structure, the whole building, the whole idea of 50 plus staff is new to them. Going from one person that they have had for three or four years into changing staff members every 40 minutes presents another challenge for them. The whole idea of the subjects and the books and the workload might be challenging.



This extract, which I felt was highly representative of what these secondary school teachers had to say about the transition, illustrated that secondary school teachers were acutely aware of some of the challenges that young people faced as they made the transition to the new school setting.

The young people that move to the new secondary school are experienced by their new teachers as people who are now more grown up. One teacher commented that:

Christine: They like the notion of being more grown up. They see themselves as being more grown up when they go into secondary school. They like making decisions...I know from talking to primary school teachers and they have said a lot of kids are ready to fly the nest at that stage and they are ready to move onto the next stage. They can morph into teenagers over night.

On this, I wonder if some young people feel the need to behave in a more grown up way when they enter the secondary school setting. This possibility is highlighted by Tobbell (2003) who found that young people can feel that they are being treated like adults when in fact they still feel like children. Do young people now have to start behaving in a way that is at odds with who they really are and try to live up to an expectation rather than being actually ready to do so? This could be another source of stress for young people at this time. Some young people may struggle to cover up difficulties they may be experiencing in an effort to give others a sense that all is well in terms of this new person-environment fit.

Even though the transition can present with challenges for young people, these teachers also acknowledged the many aspects of the transition that can be very positive. Transition is regarded as a positive time where young people can look forward to the possibility of new opportunities, new experiences and the prospect of growing up. Both focus groups acknowledged the vital role that parents and friends play in easing the transition for young people.

The secondary school teachers were very aware of the intimate primary school setting that the young people come from. One teacher gave an insight into this understanding when she commented that:

Clara: To be honest, I admire the primary school teachers. I think they do a great job in many things. The students are their pets. They know them so well and rightly so. When they come in here there is such big numbers and it's harder to know everyone. All of them have their own talents and it takes us time to get to know them.

#### **4.5.2.2: Main Theme 2- Transition can be a challenging time**

Secondary school teachers also spoke of the transition having the potential to be a challenging time. However, it was interesting for me to realise that although transition can be challenging for young people, it can be challenging for teachers too.

##### **It can be a challenging time for young people**

Secondary school teachers acknowledged that transition can be challenging for many young people. These challenges centre on changes in adapting to the new social structure and the new social norms of the secondary school setting. Now, young people have to meet the challenges of interacting with and building up relationships with more people, both peers and teachers. Another major challenge mentioned by teachers was the reality that young people had to make decisions around new subject choices. They unfortunately don't always seem to get this right.

##### **Transition can be a challenging time for teachers too**

In terms of challenges that the transition presented for secondary school staff, a very prominent issue was observed around the fact that secondary school teachers felt that young people, who transition to secondary school, have difficulty organising themselves to the level that is now expected in the new

school setting. This is evident in what one teacher had to say as illustrated below:

Aine: Organisational skills are huge. Just organising their books and going to the lockers. They have great difficulty. Like in the science lab they have two lab copies and this can create difficulties. They think what colour biro I will use. All decisions are made for them in primary school. They have just one teacher and they know exactly what that teacher prepares. We have ten or twelve different teachers and that can create difficulties.

For some young people it appears that there are different levels of organisation expected across a range of different setting. This can arise in the manner in which one teacher explains that:

Jackie: Different subjects have different requirements. What we are doing outside the classroom is fine but within the classroom we all have different systems.

These extracts left me with a sense that the young people are now expected to behave in a certain way in the new secondary school setting. This is of interest to me when I consider the suggestion that young people who lack the confidence in their ability to do their work avoid seeking help the most (Midgley and Maehr, 1998). I wonder when, where and how these new expectations (and the possibility of living up to these expectations) are made known to the young people. We have seen that they have been “mammied” in primary school. Is it therefore unfair to just expect that all of the young people come to secondary school already equipped with the skills deemed necessary to do well there? Is this mismatch another source of stress for young people during their transition journey?

#### **4.5.2.3: Main Theme 3- Supporting people around transition is important**

##### **What we do well**

On the whole, the teachers reported that they do support young people in transition. They acknowledged that the transition can present with certain

challenges for young people and they also acknowledge that young people are expected to be more grown up in the new school setting. Although the reality is that “some things are not picked up immediately”, teachers do try to support young people as they move into and move through the transition. At the beginning of the school year, some teachers have a strong sense of the challenges many young people face. They try to support their transition through pre-entry initiatives and post entry personal support.

Before the young people start in secondary, the secondary school teachers acknowledge and value the various yearly established activities that take place like the induction day, parent evenings and teacher visit to the primary school. All of these are seen as helpful. However, when the young people start in the secondary school, their new teachers do try to offer them a level of personal support. This support is based on talking to the young people and checking with them to see how they are getting on. They also try to support them in a caring way. This is evident in what one teacher had to say:

Sue: You are just keeping an eye on them and seeing if anybody is upset or anything or just watching around at breaks to see if they are mingling well with their classmates. It is just keeping an eye out really. That's the whole key.

This care and attention in the new school environment was also illustrated when another teacher mentioned that:

Pat: We try to spend time with them; we go down to talk to them, we even watch out at lunch time to make sure that they have lunch money with them. We just try and hang around with them.

This caring and looking out for the young people is a very positive support that the secondary teachers offer the young people. It is interesting that this level of support is something that the primary school teachers perceived as lacking in the secondary school. This questions the accuracy of the primary school teachers' perceptions and misunderstandings and how those perceptions and misunderstandings can be changed for the better in the future.

This issue of differing perceptions and possible misunderstandings may also be evident in the fact that primary schools reported their view that young people did not automatically receive continuity of learning support when they transferred to the new secondary school setting. This was an aspect of the transition journey that worried them and was a source of anxiety for them. What is reported here seems to be reinforced in some of what the secondary school teachers had to say. The fact is that young people are:

Jack: Not withdrawn until at least the first week of November.

However, this secondary school practice is based on the schools belief that all young people deserve a fresh start. As Jack puts it:

Jack: It is good for the kids to come in unknown.

The purpose of this is that the secondary school wants to allow time for the young people to:

Jack: Surface to their own level.

Therefore, a discrepancy between expectations and perceptions is evident in what primary and secondary school have to say. Both systems have an established and acceptable rationale for engaging in their particular practice. However, the resolution of this conflict, especially for the primary teachers may lie in access to more communication, information, joint problem solving and clarity/openness around how the other system operates and an exploration of their expectations of what the other system can do to support the transition process. That the communication that takes place between the secondary school and the primary school, only involves the primary school principal, is an issue that may need to be addressed here.

## **What we could be doing better**

In terms of what could be done better, some teachers acknowledged that gaining an insight into what the young people were thinking and feeling about in relation to the transition was important. However, it is interesting that one teacher might incorrectly be assuming that all is going well, due to the fact that in the past:

Jack: We have asked the kids if there is there anything we could have done better or differently and they have said 'No'.

The possibility of Jack making a possibly incorrect assumption is highlighted here. This is important in the context of the already highlighted reluctance or unwillingness of some young people to disclose and share their thoughts and feelings when invited to do so. This issue of what I have previously referred to as 'silence' is an important and interesting aspect of this research. It is also an interesting aspect of working with young people and understanding them. 'Silence' is something that teachers, such as Jack, need to be aware of. This issue of silence will be addressed at a later stage in this research.

## **What the primary school could do to help the process**

In response to questions of what the primary school could be doing differently the issue of organisational skills was apparent. It seems that the 'spoon feeding interaction' that takes place in primary school ill equips young people with some of the skills that are highly valued by secondary school teachers. However, the question arises as to whether it is the role of the primary school to prepare the young people for some of the specifics of the new school system or whether it is the role of the new school system to afford the young people opportunities, in the new system, to learn the skills that are now required in that system. It is also interesting to remember the communication and information sharing barrier, that primary school teachers reported to exist, and the implications of that barrier in terms of primary school teachers actually

being aware of the fact that organisational skills are a priority highlighted by secondary school teachers.

### **The role of the EP**

In relation to the role of the EP in supporting transition, the secondary school teachers were very much in line with what their primary school counterparts had to say. The EP was regarded very much as a professional who possesses specialist knowledge and skills and can act as a link between the primary and secondary school systems. The fact that the EP was perceived as always being there for consultation was reported as a great strength to aid in the transition from primary to secondary school process.

#### **4.5.2.4: Findings in Relation to Research Question 6**

In answer to what secondary school teachers told us about their experiences of working with young people who make the transition from primary to secondary school the following was evident:

Secondary school teachers regarded the transition process as predominantly positive for young people but had an awareness that young people can experience challenges along the way. Secondary school teachers acknowledged the intimate relationships and close bonds that can exist between teachers and young people in the primary school setting. Some secondary school teachers saw some young peoples' poor organisational and self management skills as a potential barrier to them reaching their potential in secondary school. Secondary school teachers, although expecting young people to be more independent and grown up, do offer new entrants a high level of support and care. This interest in each young person, as an individual who may be experiencing difficulties, is something that primary school teachers may not be aware of. Differences in perceptions and misunderstandings around continuity of care were evident between primary and secondary school staff. The EP was seen to have an important part to play in supporting the transition process in a holistic sense.

## **4.6: Overview of Main Findings**

### **For Young people**

All young people provided an insight into their primary to secondary school experience. Some reported the transition as being positive, some reported the transition as being negative and a few reported that the transition journey was not a success for them. Therefore, the transition was not a positive experience for all young people. The majority of young people spoke of the transition journey in a positive way. However, most young people experienced challenges along the way regardless of how they are experienced the overall journey. Friendships, adapting to the many changes that occur during the transition process and the support that young people felt they received were important factors in determining how positive or negative the transition journey was for a young person. Some young people reported that the reality they experienced in the new secondary school was often much more positive than the pre-transition picture they had created in their heads. Young people could communicate their transition experiences very effectively at times and under certain conditions. However, at other times and under different conditions they also become more silent and unwilling to share their thoughts, views and feelings.

### **Primary School Teachers**

Primary school teachers acknowledged that transition could be a challenging time for some young people. They also shared that it could be a challenging time for them too. Some teachers felt they offered young people a high level of support as they moved into the transition journey. They questioned whether secondary school staff offered young people a continuity of this care and seemed to be unaware of what actually went on in the secondary school. They would welcome more information and collaborative work with their secondary school counterparts.



## **Secondary School Teachers**

Some secondary school teachers also found certain aspects of school transitions challenging. Secondary school teachers did have different expectations for young people than primary school teachers. This finding is well summarised by Jindal-Snape and Foggie (2008) who conclude that primary schools fail to make young people independent while secondary schools expect them to be too independent. However, secondary school teachers showed that they did look out for young people in a caring way. This is a reality that primary school teachers may not be aware of but would welcome.

Both primary and secondary school systems were doing what they considered to be their best. However, little meaningful joined up thinking or practice was evident between what the primary and secondary school teachers had to say about transition. No formal approach to transition was reported or evidenced in what all teachers had to say in this research. Primary schools appeared to be working in isolation. The secondary school had an established informal yearly plan that they felt was working for them. No formal policy was evident in either setting. The way all teachers spoke about the transition process indicated that the same informal process, which some teachers deemed to be working, unfolded each year. Little was reported to change despite evidence that some teachers and some young people felt that some things could be done better.

### **4.7: Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, how young people experience the transition journey in terms of specific outcome measure, that being self-esteem as measured on a standardised rating scale, was presented. This was followed by an exploration and reporting of what young people and teachers actually have to say about their transition experiences. Of particular interest was what people said but also what some people, particularly some of the young people, didn't say.

In the next chapter, the initial broad results and findings, by means of a gradual distillation and refinement, will be narrowed down to main specific findings that will be presented towards the end of the chapter. These main findings will capture the real life important issues that affect teachers and young people around transition. Stating them specifically will focus thinking around planning for and managing transition in the future.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **5.1: Overview of Main Findings**

In Chapter 4, the broad findings of the research were presented. It was evident that four young people reported a decrease in self-esteem as they progressed through the transition from primary school to secondary school. Transition was a positive experience for the majority of the young people who participated in the research. However, all young people faced challenges along the way. Although some young people can have difficulties talking about their transition experiences, evidence was presented that showed that friendships are an important part of transition for many young people. Many young people would also welcome a greater level of support as they move into, move through and move out of the primary to secondary school transition.

Primary and secondary school teachers acknowledged that this transition can be a challenging time for young people. Both groups of teachers appear to work in isolation. However, both groups would welcome greater collaboration between school systems around managing the transition process each year. Lack of communication may be a factor in the negativity around transition practices that was evident, especially for some of the primary school teachers.

### **5.2: Overview of Chapter**

In this chapter, the broad findings of the research will be explored in the context of the review of the literature that took place at the beginning of this thesis (5.3). Following this, the overall findings, which were treated as a complete data set and refined through the process of thematic analysis, will be presented as a summary of main findings (5.4). In response to what the main findings tell us about the transition process, the 'Transition Corridor' will be offered as a possible and plausible means of planning for and managing transition in the future (5.5). Before concluding the chapter, an

exploration of methodological issues relating to this research will be considered (5.6). The chapter will conclude with a chapter summary (5.7).

### **5.3: Summary and Findings in Relation to the Literature**

In this research, young people provided an insight into their primary to secondary school transition experience. Some reported the transition as being positive and a success for them and some reported the transition as being negative for them. Therefore the transition was not a positive for all young people. The way that the young people spoke of their transition experience corroborates the findings of previous international research (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Zeedyk, 2003) and Irish research (O' Brien, 2004; Smyth, McCoy & Darmody, 2004) that has explored the experiences of young people who make the transition from primary to secondary school.

The majority of young people spoke of the transition journey in a positive way. It was evident in what they said about the transition journey that it was a time of great change where the young people were eagerly striving to achieve the developmental tasks as previously outlined by Simmons and Blythe (1987), these being the task of achieving a new self image, intensifying peer relationships, establishing independence and planning for the future. It was evident that most young people experienced challenges along the way, even those who found the journey generally positive. Again the challenges these young people spoke of echo the findings of previous studies of young people and their primary to secondary school experience (Hirsch and Dubois, 1992; Bronstein, 1996; Alspaugh, 1998.)

Friendships, adapting to the many changes that occurred during the transition process and the support young people received were important factors in determining how positive or negative the transition journey is for a young person. These factors could be explained in Schlosberg's Theory of Transition (1981) in terms of **situation, self, support and strategies**. The potential barriers to success, that may crop up for young people along the transition journey, can be fruitfully addressed if one manages the transition in terms of

comparing the pre-transition **situation** and the post transition situation and adopting a solution focused approach to finding ways of filling the gaps that may exist between the Bureaucratic, Social and Emotional, Curriculum, Pedagogical and Management of Learning bridges (Galton, Grey and Ruddick, 1999). Equipping young people with relevant skills and knowledge and developing their sense of **self** within a structured and meaningful **support** framework will enable and empower young people to cope with change and adapt to the many changes that will take place as they move into, through and out of the transition. Developing this framework for inclusion and having a shared understanding of effective **strategies** needs to be done within a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). It needs to be dynamic, ongoing and guided by the principle of willingness and openness to make and implement positive changes around supporting young people.

In terms of the model of stage–environment fit (Eccles, Midgley, Bchanan, Reuman, Flanagan and Iver, 1993) primary school teachers felt they offered young people a high level of support as they moved into the transition journey. They appeared to think of the transition in terms of a social model (Stephen and Cope, 2003) where things could be done for young people to prepare the environment for them and ensure more favourable transition outcomes for all. Some primary schools questioned whether secondary school staff offered young people a continuity of this care and support and seemed to be unaware of what actually went on in the secondary school. They welcomed more information and collaborative work with their secondary school counterparts.

Secondary school teachers had different expectations for young people than primary school teachers. A more medical model (Stephen and Cope, 2003) view of transition was evident with these teachers feeling that new entrants simply have to fit into the new school setting from the beginning. A change in stage-environment fit seems apparent as young people move into the new secondary school setting. Never the less, they did look out for young people in a caring way. This was a reality that primary school teachers were perhaps unaware of but would welcome.

Both primary and secondary school systems were doing what they considered to be their best. However, little meaningful joined up thinking or practice was evident between what the primary and secondary school teachers had to say about their transition experiences and practices and what they reported they and their schools do around transition.

No formal approach to transition was reported or evidenced in what all teachers had to say in this research. Primary schools appeared to work in isolation and felt as if they worked in isolation. Primary schools seemed to have a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) around supporting young people around transition. However, they felt as if they were working in the dark and didn't have enough insight into what they should be doing. The secondary school had an established informal yearly plan that they felt worked for them. A more fixed mindset was evident here. No formal policy was evident in either setting.

The way all teachers spoke about the transition process indicated that the same informal process, which some teachers deem to be working, unfolded each year. Little was reported to change despite evidence that some teachers and some young people felt that some things could be done better.

#### **5.4: Distillation, Discussion and Implications of the Main Findings**

Having presented the broad findings of this research, this new data set was thematically analysed so that these broader findings could then be presented as very specific and focused statements or main findings. These main findings capture the real life important issues around transition that affect teachers and young people. Stating them specifically ensures that something positive and focused can be done in terms of ensuring meaningful future change around managing the transition from primary to secondary school.

#### **5.4.1: Main Finding 1-One size does not fit all**

Young people can experience a range of emotions and feelings as they move into, through and out of the school transition. Some can be happy, some can be nervous and some can be both. Some can find the journey positive whereas some can find it negative. Some can experience an increase in their self-esteem levels whereas some may experience a decrease. Most young people experience some challenges. The challenges reported here echo the findings of Kennedy and Cox (2008) as mentioned in Chapter 2. The lesson to be learned is that a 'one size fits all' approach to supporting young people around transition will do little to address individual differences in how young people experience the transition.

This begs the questions as to how teachers gain an insight into how young people are feeling. I believe that the simple answer to this is to ask them or invite them to share how they are feeling. This can be done as they move into the transition and will allow the teacher to match teaching and learning to the needs of the young people, as reported by them. It can also be done as the young people move through the transition and will facilitate the secondary school in ensuring a more stage or person-environment fit. Accessing what young people are thinking can be done using questionnaires. This is a good approach as evidenced in how the young people reacted to the questionnaire used here. The use of writing certainly seems to be less threatening than a direct questioning approach as we have seen in the course of this research process. We have seen that young people can be reluctant to share their thoughts when they may have a sense that their comments could be seen as criticisms and therefore perhaps have negative repercussions for them in some way.

#### **5.4.2: Main Finding 2: Friends are a significant protective factor for young people during the transition from primary to secondary school.**

From what the young people have to say, friends and friendships are both very important for them as they move in, move through and move out of the

transition from primary to secondary school. This finding is very much in line with the findings of Measor and Woods (1984) that suggest that friendships play a critical role in providing support, reassurance and security for young people at this time. This finding is important to remember when we consider the findings of Pratt and George (2008) who found that supports that young people received in both primary and secondary schools revealed little or no attention being paid to the issue of peer relations and the importance of friendships during transition.

Friends and friendships can act as protective factor. This was prominent in what many young people said when exploring some of the transition experiences. Having friends, as young people move into the transition, can lead to more positive primary and secondary transition related appraisals by young people (Schlossberg, 1995) and higher levels of security around the transition and having someone to hang around with in the new environment can make that new environment less daunting.

Having friends also seems to help in making new friends. Although having friends and making new friends can be positive, not having friends, being separated from old friends and finding it difficult to make new ones can be a source of stress and anxiety for some young people. The changes in many aspects of the new school environment in terms of new routines, fewer group activities, less opportunities for play can lessen the opportunities young people have to create and maintain friendships. This creates difficulties in terms of the mismatch between opportunities and the innate drive that may be taking place in terms of young people striving to achieve a number of developmental tasks.

Schools need to be aware of this stage-environment mis-fit and need to be proactive in creating opportunities for young people to be comfortable in terms of friendships and experiencing opportunities that allow for the development of more positive interactions. Looking and managing First Year class groupings with friends in mind could make a difference for some young people (Hertzog and Morgan, 1998). Young people could also benefit from formally organised



and valued in-school opportunities for positive peer interactions such as co-operative learning opportunities, peer tutoring opportunities, mentoring peer mentoring systems. Specific programmes such as 'Circle of Friends' (Newton & Wilson, 1998) that aim to develop young peoples' social skills could be useful. A very exciting initiative, as posited by Morrison (2000) and Johnstone (2001), could be the use of modern technologies such as social networking sites, email and the internet to provide young people with pre-transition opportunities to connect with their perspective peers. This would be an exciting way of overcoming difficulties associated with the large geographical location that is evident here.

More informal initiatives could be initiated during break times, after school, etc that afford young people opportunities to interact with their peers and acquire a sense of belonging. Any activities that promote positive peer interactions would be welcome (Mac Iver, 1990). Activities that promote a sense of belonging in young people can be positive in the manner in which it has been linked to gains in self-esteem, positive attitude and reduction in feelings of anger (Midgely & Maehr, 1998). However, rather than leave these to chance, schools and school staff need to make these happen for young people in transition.

#### **5.4.3: Main Finding 3: Young people can find it difficult to talk about some aspects of their transition experience**

In terms of their experiences of the transition journey between primary and secondary school, all of the young people have something to say. This research process allowed young people to express their voice and their voices varied in what they had to say and how they said it. Some found transition to be a very positive experience where as a few did not. All young people spoke of the varying degree of challenges they faced along the way. Young people, at times and under certain conditions, spoke openly about some aspects of transition. However, at other times they seemed reluctant or unwilling to share and these occasions were characterised by what the present researcher called 'silence'.

In relation to this notion of silence, it is interesting to explore the possible reasons for this silence. Was it a skills deficit in that the young people could adequately describe their experience but did not have the cognitive ability to talk about more abstract aspects issues such as supports or making recommendations and thinking in a solution focused way? Could it have been that the young people had moved into, through and out of the transition journey had simply gotten on with it, without thinking too much about it or feeling the need to reflect further on it? Though these factors may be important, I believe that it was more of a performance deficit which related to possible power relations that, despite the researcher best efforts, continued to exist in both the new setting and the research process. This may have contributed to the development of a situation in which the young people were not comfortable speaking about the new school system in a way that they perceived could have negative consequences for them. The nature of a face to face interview may have been an important factor here and is an issue which will be explored later.

However, the implications of what the young people did say are many. To begin with, it is crucial that the transition from primary to secondary school journey is acknowledged as the crucial time in young peoples' lives. Great positivity and energy can exist as young people prepare for the transition. Transition can therefore be framed positively as a time when there is wonderful potential for this energy to be harnessed and built on and perpetuated. However, transition needs to be seen and understood in terms of as a process that takes place over time, and a process which can be planned for and managed in a way that strives to ensure more favourable outcomes for not some young people, not a few young people but all young people.

In terms of planning and managing transition, it is imperative that all of the stakeholders have a joined up approach to what they are doing and what needs to be done. The establishment of a working policy is necessary and such a policy would ideally be contextualised in a spirit of a partnership between primary and secondary schools. This partnership should espouse shared vision, genuineness, openness, mutual respect as its guiding

principles. From what young people have said, it is evident that they have opinions and feelings about their experiences of transition and these opinions are valuable if the transition journey is to be understood. It is imperative, that the young peoples' voices are incorporated into decisions that are made around transition and that the specifics of what they say are addressed in planning for change. What young people say can provide a very valuable insight into what is going on for them and listening can enable others to better understand young people in terms of issues such as arenas of comfort, developmental tasks and so on.

In relation to young peoples' silence around transition, it is important that whilst young peoples' reluctance to share needs to be respected (Anita Harris, 2004) alternative methods and approaches that can be used to access young people's voices need to be explored. A very valuable resource here might be *Consulting with Young People: A Review of the Literature* (Bragg, 2007). In this way, safer spaces can be created for young people to share, talk, discuss, criticise and explore and engage in research.

In any exploration of possible alternative ways of interacting with young people and engaging with them in a research context, potential issues around power asymmetry need to be examined carefully. Working with young people in a way that understands them and respects them as participants and co-researchers rather than objects, subjects or social actors will aid the process here.

#### **5.4.4: Main Finding 4-Young people would like access to more information**

As young people move into, through and out of their transition journey, they have reported that they would like access to more information. Having access to more and accurate information will enable and empower them to prepare for the journey that lies ahead and will give them an opportunity to build up accurate and realistic expectations of the journey. This will certainly help alleviate pre-transition worries and anxieties that some young people may

have. It will also enable young people to build up accurate pictures of what the new secondary school experience will be like and strengthen their primary and secondary appraisals of the transition journey (Schlossberg, 1995). It is evident that sometimes young people can have a negative perception of the secondary school before they make the transition. It is only after making the move that they come to realise that the reality is much different to what they thought and perhaps wasted so much negative energy on.

In terms of giving young people accurate information, it is important that transition specific teaching and learning experiences are provided to young people as they move into, through and out of the transition process. This can be done by providing learning experiences that strike a balance between addressing top-down specific learning experiences, which focus on important aspects of the transition from the point of views of the teachers, and bottom-up learning experiences based on the questions that young people ask. Specific transition relevant programmes can also be used as can the sharing of real life scenarios as shared by young people or transition ambassadors who have already gone through the experience. Access to information can also be readily made available to young people in the form of pamphlets, booklets, videos, web pages, social networking sites, and so on.

A lot of preparatory work can also be achieved in incorporating aspects of transition into much of the work that is already being done in schools. Timetables can be experienced in a Maths lesson whereas map reading can be covered in Geography. Making friends and developing social skills can be explored in Social, Personal and Health Education and activities such as solution focused role play can be explored in Drama. It is not a question of working toward successful transitions in isolation but having an awareness of transition as an important time and incorporating support around transition into the young peoples' school experience as they prepare for it.

#### **5.4.5: Main Finding 5: Primary and secondary school teachers are interested in transition and want to support all young people**

Both primary and secondary schools work with young people in a way that they feel is best. Both groups have an insight into what the transition is like for young people and both report the challenges teachers face in response to transition. This is an interesting finding of this research and is an issue that is little researched to date. Both perceive themselves to offer high levels of support to young people. However, both systems work in isolation. Although an established predominantly top down yearly approach to managing the transition is evident, little appears to change from year to year. Primary school teachers feel that they don't really know enough about the secondary school or get enough information from the secondary school. In fact, some primary school teachers have a perception that the secondary school may not offer young people a continuation of the high level support and care that they receive in the primary school. A sense of mistrust was evident in what some of the primary school teachers had to say about this.

It is interesting to explore the fact that the primary schools appear to be more open to change than the secondary school and appear to have a predominantly growth mindset as opposed to the more predominantly fixed mindset that is evident in the secondary school. The primary reason for this may lie in the context in which this research took place. As mentioned previously, this secondary school is the only secondary school in the area and is fed by the 13 primary schools. The fact that all young people traditionally transition to that one secondary school automatically suggests that the secondary school has no competition in terms of needing to promote itself as a centre of excellence. The young people are going to come in anyway. Therefore, there may be a feeling of 'if it is working why change it'. The school is under no pressure to make changes or to reflect on certain aspects of what they could be doing better. In terms of the bigger picture, the concept of transition may be low down on the school's list of priorities, as all of the young people in the area have no alternative choice and have to make the transition into this school anyway.

It is important that schools prioritise 'transition' as one area for development and become reflective systems in terms of evaluating what they are currently doing well and becoming solution focused around what they could be doing better. Dialogue around transition would be welcome here.

#### **5.4.6: Main Finding 6-Schools need to work together**

It is evident that both groups of teachers are working away and doing their best as they see it. However, they work in isolation and this isolation can lead to worry, anxiety and misunderstandings. It is therefore important that the lines of communication are opened up and opportunities for collaboration and liaison between teachers are established. In terms of schools working together it is important that "the starting point for such relationships is a recognition of the difference each brings to the transition and a willingness to communicate about these in order that common and consistent goals can be set and attained" (Dockett and Perry, 2004, p.228). Each system has to be aware of their role in the transition process and what their counterparts are doing and expect. Both formal and informal communication pathways need to be established as do opportunities for teachers to ask questions, gain information, seek clarification etc. It needs to be acknowledged that all teachers work under time and resources constraints. Therefore, it is important that key personnel or transition co-ordinators/ enablers are identified in each school to facilitate a smooth process. These people can also act as a link person between schools and transition clusters. As this research took place in a very neat geographical location, this prospect of partnership between schools is all the more achievable. The advent of a comprehensive policy around transition, that involves all the stakeholders, would be valuable here. This policy would let teachers be aware of what is best practice into supporting young people around the transition. It would also make it clear to everyone what can be to be done to ensure more favourable outcomes for everybody.

## **5.5: Towards a new Framework for managing Transition...The Transition Corridor**

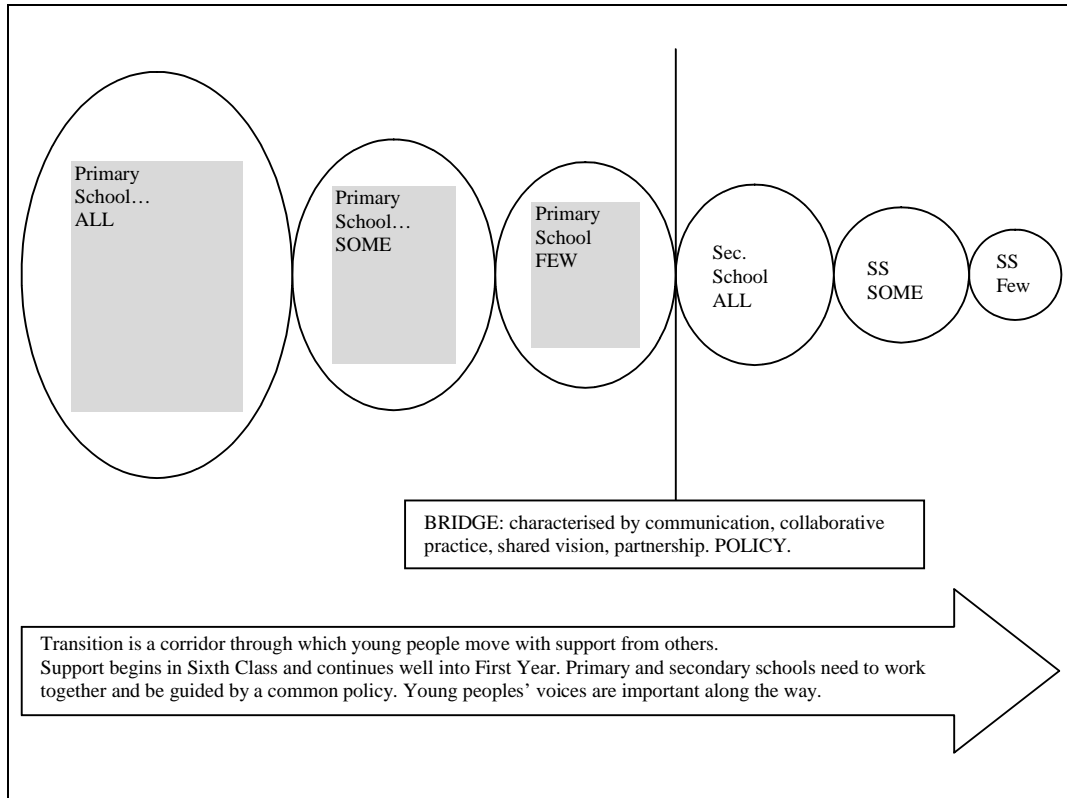
This research has provided a lot of information around how young people and their teachers experience the primary to secondary school transition. This information, set against the backdrop of previous research and conceptual frameworks, is important in moving forward our thinking and practice around transition and the management of this process in a way that ensure more favourable outcomes for everyone. I will now present my new framework for action that I have called 'The transition Corridor'.

### **5.5.1: Planning for the Future-The 'Transition Corridor'**

Stated simply, the 'Transition Corridor' is a framework that I developed during this research process, and I believe it can be used to guide a person's thinking and understanding of the transition process. It provides a map of the process in terms of appropriate knowledge, skills, roles, intervention and supports that can be afforded to young people and schools along the way.

The fundamental guiding principle of this new framework is that of Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfrenbrenner, 1979, 1999). The already mentioned NEPS Model of Service: Continuum of Support Framework for Intervention also guided the development of this new framework. The strengths of building on the NEPS model are that it is a model that is already embedded in both the primary and secondary school systems in Ireland. This means that all teachers are familiar with the framework- its terminology and principles. Therefore, a shared language around this framework is already in existence in schools. This helps in ensuring that all previous teacher learning can now be meaningfully applied and transferred to the transition process. In this way, the new proposed framework is simply building on what teachers already know and have seen to be working when applied to other areas of support for young people such as learning difficulties, social and emotional difficulties and behavioural difficulties. A visual representation of what the 'Transition Corridor' looks like is provided in Figure 18 :

Figure 18: Visual Representation of the 'Transition Corridor'.



**ALL:** All young people will experience teaching and learning for transition as they move into through and out of the transition journey.

**SOME:** Some young people may require additional teaching and learning for transition as they move into, through and out of the transition journey.

**FEW:** A few young people, especially young people who experience additional difficulties/disabilities may require additional teaching and learning experiences around transition as they move into, through and out of the transition journey.

### 5.5.2: Guiding Principles

In conjunction with the National Strategies Strengthening Transfer and Transition Project (2008) conditions for transfer as mentioned and outlined earlier, this framework is guided by and heavily relies on the following guiding principles if it is to be successfully implemented.

1. Transition is an anticipated event and a crucial time in young peoples' lives. It involves changes in young people, their families, their peer groups, their schools and their communities. Sometimes it even



involves and should involve changes in policies and practices at local and national level. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1999). An Eco-systemic approach to managing transition is vital according to Jindal-Snape and Foggie (2008) who suggest that “although the role of and professionals has been discussed extensively in previous research, there is a need to look at the interplay between the child, school, family and community” (p.7)

2. Transition can be positive for some and negative for others. No size fits all. It takes place over time and needs to be managed and planned for as young people move into, through and out the transition. It entails striking a balance between preparing the young people for the anticipated change and preparing the new environment to receive these young people. It calls for exploration of a way that ensures an appropriate stage-environment fit. A comprehensive and working policy that addresses the 4s (Schlossberg, 1987) of Situation, Self, Support and Strategies around transition is the basis or foundation of any effort to successfully managing transition. (See Appendix 24 for examples of specific supports and interventions that may apply here).
3. Any transition policy can be tailored to suit the needs of the context for which it is designed. However, the transition process needs to be thought about and understood within the wider context of what information and evidence based practice is already available and in terms of already existing conceptual frameworks that can inform our thinking around transition. Examples of possible frameworks include Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1999), Arenas of Comfort (Simmons & Blythe, 1987), Stage-Environment Fit (Eccles et al. 1993), Models of Inclusion (Stephen & Cope, 2003), Mindset Theory (Dweck, 2006), Adolescent Theory (Schulenberg, Maggs, & Hurrelmann, 1997) and so on. Many more conceptual frameworks exist and need to be sought out and researched. Ongoing learning about transition is important if the process it to be dynamic and characterised by growth as opposed to stagnation.
4. Opportunities, on both sides of the transition bridge, for teaching and learning for transition need to be provided for **all** young people. **Some**

young people who are experiencing difficulties will benefit from additional input. A **few**, especially those who have additional needs may benefit from more specific and individualised interventions. Teaching and learning opportunities need to be formally incorporated into the school curriculum. Each one of The Five Bridges (Galton, Grey & Ruddick, 1999) needs to be explored and addressed, these being the Bureaucratic Bridge, the Social and Emotional Bridge, The Curriculum Bridge, The Pedagogy Bridge and the Management of Learning Bridge. Teaching and learning can be both formal and informal. It can be based on what teachers feel young people need to learn and on what the young people themselves feel they need to know. The voice of each young person is important and we need to find ways of enabling young people to express themselves around their needs.

5. If teaching and learning experiences are provided successfully, then the level of support that young people will need will decrease as they move into, through and out of the transition journey. Therefore, an investment in teaching and learning for transition pays dividends in the future in terms of time, resources, and outcomes for young people and schools.
6. The bridge between primary and secondary school needs to be characterised by spirit of partnership between the primary and secondary school system. This is vital as “effective transitions have as their base cooperative and collaborative relationships between and among all involved” (Docket & Perry, 2004, p.228). Communication and opportunities for meaningful dialogue need to be ongoing and the most appropriate and effective communications systems clarified. All relevant information needs to be shared within an appropriate ethical framework (See appendix 25 for template). Joined by a shared goal, both primary and secondary school system needs to feel secure in the knowledge that they can express their needs and views at all times and will receive the support they feel they need.
7. This framework and the policy it enshrines needs to be regarded as a dynamic and workable guide for action and change. It will work best if people are open to making changes to meet new demands and if

people who use it are open to facing the challenges that change brings. A growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) will keep this process alive whereas a fixed mindset will find the framework and all its guiding principles gathering dust on a shelf somewhere.

8. This framework, in terms of planning for and managing transition can be enhanced through the use of the following document templates:

- The Transition Support Plan (See Appendix 24).
- The Transition Profile (See Appendix 25).

The Transition Support Plan is an outline of activities and interventions that can be undertaken with a view to managing groups in transition and addresses many pieces of the transition jig-saw. The 'Transition Corridor' should be regarded as a dynamic and generic framework that guides planning for transition. It is also a framework that can be used to incorporate specific transition interventions that are seen as important at a particular time and in a particular context. The 'Transition Corridor' is not prescriptive in terms of interventions but acts as a reminder that interventions are an important part of the ongoing management of and planning for the primary school to secondary school transition process. The Transition Profile manages the sharing of information between the primary and secondary school.

### **5.6: Methodological Limitations**

This research aimed to gain an insight into the voice of young people and their teachers around the primary to secondary school transition process. I valued what the young people and teachers had to say as I believed that it would create an understanding of the transition journey and enable us to explore changes that could be made to facilitate more positive transition outcomes for young people and schools in the future.

Although this research has gone some way in achieving what it set out to achieve, a number of methodological considerations need to be explored with

a view to determining ways in which this research could be improved upon and ways in which similar future research could be enhanced.

This research was carried out with a modest sample of young people and teachers within a very insular and rural context. Therefore the generalisation of the findings and their application to other groups and settings, especially large urban settings may be limited. This is an important when one considers the finding of Gillson, Standage and Skevington (2008) who suggest that the transition challenges faced by young people in a small school setting may be very different from those experienced by others in a large urban setting.

Another methodological consideration addresses the “silence” that characterised some of instances where the young people were invited to share their thoughts feeling and views of their transition experience. Fielding (2004) offers a possible explanation of this silence in terms of young people becoming tired of the increasing numbers of invitations to share their views on matters that are really no longer important to them. The methods we use may also be framed in a language that they find restrictive alienating and patronising. They may also feel that there is no real point to expressing their views as their experience might tell them that nothing is going to change anyway.

In this instance, it was evident that the young people responded more positively to the questionnaire than they did to the face to face interviewing. This highlights the need to explore more ways of eliciting the views of young people, especially in instances where power relations may be at play. If young people are reluctant to share their experience in a face to face interview, then opportunities around methods and research settings that allow them to share their experiences more comfortably need to be explored. It is worthy to highlight the very exciting literature relating to children and young people-centred research techniques (Barker & Weller, 2003) such as photographs, diaries, in-depth interviews and surveys. A growth mindset around alternative methods would be valuable here.

Along with the methods employed in eliciting the voice of the young people, the research setting is also interesting to explore. The semi-structured interviews took place in a very formal setting within the school building. In hindsight, this may have not been the most appropriate setting in which to carry out meaningful conversations with the young people. The contextual circumstances in which research takes place with young people can sometimes reinforce subjugation (Fielding, 2004). In terms of real world research and capturing the real world of young people, it may have been more fruitful to interact with the young people in the less formal and more relaxed and potentially group settings of the yard at break time, hanging around the lockers or in the canteen.

Whilst exploring alternative ways of working with young people and giving them appropriate ways to share their perspective and experiences, it needs to be acknowledged and respected that young people too can exert power and control over what they share (Harden, 2000). Perhaps the young people who took part in this research had their own ways of exerting control over the interview process and were using strategies to protect themselves. According to Charmaz (1995) young people are holders of information and can control what they choose to share or hide.

Whether young people choose to share or remain silent, this process has highlighted the need for researcher to be open to the myriad of ways in which young people can be invited to share their views. Any researcher makes decisions around what methods he/she will use to elicit views. If they employed method falls short in terms of eliciting what the researcher intended, then that has to be respected so that the young people are not bullied or coerced into feeling that they need to share. It is the difference between carrying out research on young people rather than with young people (Barker & Weller, 2003) and has more to do with negotiation rather than imposition (Hill, Laybourne & Borland, 1996).

Researchers make decisions around what methods they will best employ as they seek out answers to their research questions. I choose the semi-

structured interview as a way to explore exactly what the young people were saying. As it transpired, the young people choose not to say a lot. This could have been down to the research method or the research setting. The resulting transcripts were based on real recordings of what the young people were saying and were analysed according to what the young people were saying. A more productive outcome could have been achieved if I had initially set out with capturing not only what the young people had to say but also how they said it. Through the process of discourse or conversational analysis, as opposed to the actual employed method of thematic analysis, I could have set out to capture the subtleties of the manner in which the young people were communicating as well as what they were communicating. This insight could have been valuable in exploring the quality of the young peoples' voices as opposed to mere quantity.

Another methodological consideration relates to the rich information that was evident in the data arising from the SDQ-11 questionnaires that the young people completed. One may regard the nature of the statistical analysis that was applied to this data as superficial. However, the method I choose was what I considered to be a best fit in terms of achieving the aims of the research and answering the research questions. It is true that a wealth of information could have been gleamed through the application of more complex statistical analyses. I was interested in capturing what **individual** young people and teachers had to say around their transition experiences. I wanted to carry out research which “starts with no preconceptions about the transition experience but rather seeks to the students to set the agenda and to express their own experiences and feelings about the transition from primary to secondary school” (Tobbell, 2003, p. 6). I wanted my research to be more concerned with “speaking with” rather than “speaking for” people (Fielding, 2004, p.305). However, it does raise an interesting issue in terms of further research.

A final consideration must be given to the fact that the teachers who participated in the research were self selecting in their decision to do so. By choosing to participate in this research, are these teachers reflecting their

interest, long experience and perhaps expertise in the area of transition. If this was the case, then some teacher's contributions may have skewed the findings and provided an overly positive view of the primary to secondary school transition and the reality in schools.

### **5.7: Chapter Summary.**

This chapter has outlined the main findings of this research. The practical implications of each of these findings have been outlined with an overall emphasis being placed on the need for the development of a transition policy that guides schools as they work together around planning for and managing the primary to secondary school transition. The 'Transition Corridor' was offered as a possible framework that could be useful as a means of conceptualising and planning for transition practices. A number of important guiding principles for this framework to be effective were also outlined. Having achieved this stage in the research process, where a meaningful framework for change has been offered, this research was then explored in terms of methodological limitations that may have had an impact on the research process and the findings that emerged.

# Chapter 6: Conclusion

## 6.1 Overview of Chapter

In this, the final chapter, the main finding of the research will be outlined (6.2). As these findings have already been explored in terms of implications for schools, this chapter will now explore the implications of this research and the research finding in terms of implications for educational psychologists (6.3) and educational psychology services (6.4). Following this, the original and distinctive contributions that the researcher feels that this researcher has made in terms of understanding transition and adding to educational psychology practice and thinking will be outlined (6.5). Suggestions for further research will offered (6.6) prior to the researcher sharing some final reflections on the achievement of the aims of the research (6.7). The chapter and thesis will end with a few concluding remarks (6.8).

## 6.2 Summary of Main Findings

This research investigated the primary to secondary school transition process that a group of young people and some of their teachers experienced. Due to the fact that little or no change in transition practices had taken place in the recent past, it was likely that many young people had experienced a similar process in the past. If no change was to occur, it was likely that many more young people would experience a similar process in the future. Although, this research has reported many important findings, I believe the main findings, which encapsulate as many of the general findings as possible, can be summarised as follows:

1. One size does not fit all.
2. Friends are very important during the transition journey.
3. Young people can find it difficult to talk about their transition experiences.
4. Young people would like access to more support and information as they move into, through and out of the transition journey.



5. All teachers are interested in young people and transition.
6. Primary and secondary Schools need to work together and be guided by a transition policy.

### **6.3: Implications for the Educational Psychologist**

This research has been valuable in the manner in which it has drawn attention to the importance of transition in all young peoples' lives. The research has also created an understanding of the lived reality of the transition journey for young people and their teachers. It incorporated their voices into a framework for change. The findings have many implications for me as an Educational Psychologist, and the service in which I am employed. These implications also are relevant to other EPs and other services.

In terms of EPs, this research has focused on the transition between primary and secondary school. Each year in Ireland, around 50,000 young people make this transition. It is a journey that most young people have to make. This research suggests that each year around 2,000 young people may experience declines in their self esteem levels as they make the transition to secondary school and 1,000 may experience the journey as being unsuccessful for them. This means that a lot of young people have difficulty making the transition for one reason or another.

For EPs, who strive to support all young people in aspects of their schooling, these statistics reinforce the urgency of supporting all young people at this crucial and potentially vulnerable time in their lives. It begins with EPs drawing attention to transition as a time that needs to be managed and planned for and creating instances for dialogue around transition in terms of what is being done in schools and what can be done better.

In relation to work negotiated in schools, I believe that EPs can engage with schools in a more supportive and developmental way and in a way that creates a space for transition to be explored and addressed in a positive way. With the current emphasis on individual casework that schools request, the

possibility of and need to develop policies and practice around transition can be carefully negotiated between the EP and the school. This will be best done in a way that explicitly details the potential positive outcomes, of any transition specific endeavours, for all young people and schools.

Having created a positive context for engaging with schools around planning for transition, the EP is then in a positive environment in which he/she can engage in student-focused indirect interventions, student-focused direct interventions, school wide interventions and system wide interventions.

In terms of student-focused indirect interventions, the EP can be there for schools to support them around the overall development of transition policies and procedures. This research has shown that teachers welcome the availability of the EP in terms of offering guidance, support, and experience. Therefore, being there for schools and teachers in a consultative way (Wagner, 2008) and as a critical friend will be of great benefit to the schools. Creating awareness and an understanding of the 'Transition Corridor', theoretical frameworks, existing research into transition and examples of best practice will be worthwhile at this stage. This planning stage is crucial in determining the nature of change and shaping the future of what will be done to support young people around transition. Therefore, it is important to get it right. I believe that supporting schools, as they develop their practices around transition, is where the EP has the most important role to play.

In terms of student-focused direct intervention, I believe that the EP has a lesser role to play here. Perhaps the role is one of giving psychology away (Macleod, Macmillan & Norwich, 2007) and empowering teachers to carry on working with groups of young people or individuals who have issues relating to the transition journey.

In terms of school wide interventions, the EP can support the transition process in terms of working with schools in a way that increases teacher's and school's knowledge and skills around transition. This can be achieved through on-going support and development work including in-service training

for teachers, review and evaluation procedures and consultation around specific programmes and evidence based approaches to supporting transition. Again, supporting schools at the initial stages is important.

In relation to system-wide interventions, the EP has a lot to offer in terms of bringing support for transition into the wider community. Supporting parents can be an important element of transition planning as can liaising with other agencies and professionals.

It is important to acknowledge that EPs can be a huge support to schools as they develop their practices and policies around managing transition. However, EPs need to be aware of the impact of doing too much for schools and getting drawn into an expectation that they will manage the transition and not the schools. The EP has a role to play in supporting and guiding schools as they begin the process of change. However, this support is given with an expectation that the schools will become learning organisations who will gradually take over the process and make it their own. In short, the EP can empower and enable schools to build their own bridges rather than unwittingly disempowering them by taking on too much and becoming their bridge.

#### **6.4: Implications for the Educational Psychology Service**

For an EP service such as NEPS, this research stresses the benefits of supporting young people and schools around transition in the manner in which all young people can benefit. It draws attention to the need for EP services to acknowledge transition as an important time in every young person's life and stresses the need for psychologists to support schools around managing this process. In this way, services need to clarify their organisational thinking on the process of transition and need to clarify the role that the service feels it has to play in supporting schools and all young people.

One way of clarifying this role is the development of a service policy in relation to supporting schools around the primary to secondary school transition process. This policy could be instrumental in creating best practice protocols

for schools that could be available for schools as they manage transition and plan for it.

NEPS has done excellent work in the past in relation to developing protocols for schools around school based issues like Managing Critical Incidents, A Continuum of Support, Guides to Teaching and Learning and so on. Now might be the time to centre the focus on developing national guidelines to support schools around managing successful transitions.

In terms of research and development work, the service is in a prime position to tap into the research skills and knowledge and expertise of its EPs. Keeping the momentum alive in relation to transition could be achieved through investing time and energy into additional and ongoing research into the process of transition in Irish schools.

#### **6.5: Original and Distinctive Contributions**

This research has highlighted the issue and importance of the primary to secondary school transition in Ireland. It has established that transition is a process that is worthy of attention and warrants further investigation at local and national level. It has answered a number of relevant research questions. This is very important when one considers what little research has been carried out into transition in Ireland.

In addition to highlighting the current situation in Ireland, this research has also added to the general body of knowledge and understanding that exists around transition in general. It has suggested possible changes to methods and aspects of future research that could be done differently. It has provided pointers in terms of future directions around supporting schools and young people around transition. Its unique contribution lies in the manner in which it incorporates all which we now know into a framework for action, this being the 'Transition Corridor'.

## **6.6: Suggestions for Further Research**

Arising from this research, a number of suggestions for further research can be identified.

The role of parents is worthy of further research. Their experiences and perceptions are important and need to be incorporated into any attempt to plan for the primary to secondary school transition. Parents have a very positive role to play during transition (Mizelle and Irwin, 2000). Parents and families are a great strength in the transition equation and their voice is essential if the transition process is to be managed more efficiently and effectively. Future research that explores the parental voice around transition is essential.

This research took place in a very rural setting. Gillison, Standage and Skevington (2008) suggest that the transition experiences of young people in rural settings may differ greatly from that of their peers who live in urban settings. Schiller (1999) concluded that young people in urban school systems, with larger populations and greater school choices, are more likely to experience more chaotic transitions than those in rural areas. Therefore, research that investigates transition in Ireland, in a more holistic way, could be carried out in an urban setting. This research direction would also be an opportunity to investigate school transitions where an element of 'choice' of secondary school, which was absent in this research, is added into the equation. Differences between the rural and urban transition settings could be investigated. This would certainly make a very valuable contribution to our understanding of the primary to secondary school transition in Ireland.

The primary to secondary school transition is effectively the second transition experience for many young Irish people, with the majority now making an earlier transition from pre-school to primary school. If we are to look on transition as a life long process, then it makes sense to start at the beginning and investigate the pre-school to primary school transition. The secondary to third-level transition could also be the focus of research in the future.

This research looked at the transition experiences of young people in a generic sense. Future research could build on this in relation to exploring the experiences of specific populations. This could be the experiences of young people who have documented special educational needs, young people who experience additional barriers to success such as people from the travelling community and international students, and young people who are effectively missing in our educational system.

Additional research into transition in Ireland could place a greater emphasis on working with young people as researchers and co-researchers (Fielding, 2004). It would be interesting to work with young people from the very beginning of the research process and in a way that strives for young people to achieve a higher standing in Hart's (1992) 'ladder of participation'. Young people could be involved in the formulation of the research questions. Involving young people as co-researchers in this way could address such issues as the "silence" that I make reference to in this research. If future research questions are directly related to the ways in which young people are thinking about transition, then I believe the young people will be more open and receptive to providing answers to their own questions. O' Kane and Hayes (2006) tell us that we can learn a lot more about young peoples' direct experiences by including them as partners in the research process

An interesting aspect to any future research could build on the explanatory nature of this research and go about exploring transition in an evaluative manner. This could entail the evaluation of an intervention or process for change such as the 'Transition Corridor'. This would provide evidence for whether managing transition is a worthwhile exercise and could provide information on aspects of the 'Transition Corridor' that need to be changed in terms of its effectiveness in the real world.

## **6.7: Reflection on Achievement of the Aims of the Research**

This research was undertaken with a view to exploring the lived reality of transition from the point of view of young people and their teachers. Their voice was seen as important element in the framework for change.

In evaluating this research, I refer to the work of Dennis Thiessen (1997) who states that for research into peoples' perspectives to be effective, it has to comprise three levels of engagement: Level 1: knowing about peoples' perspectives, Level 2: acting on behalf of peoples' perspectives and Level 3: working with peoples perspectives. Keeping these three levels of engagement in mind, I feel confident that the research achieved its aims and built a solid foundation on which more can to be achieved around understanding the primary to secondary school transition journey.

In relation to knowing about peoples' perspectives, this research has provided an insight into the real experiences of young people and teachers. It has outlined what has been learned and what the research has found. It has created an understanding about the transition journey as experienced by young people and teachers. The research invites the reader to draw what lessons they will and it invites them to take something away. It is this something that will then enable them to go away and reflect on what they are doing and create a new vision of what they need to do. It also invites readers to become researchers and agents of change in the future.

In addition to knowing about peoples' perspectives, this research can act on behalf of the peoples' perspectives in the manner in which their voices have been heard and their lived experiences have been incorporated into a framework for change in a meaningful way. This research also calls on readers to go away, reflect upon and review their own transition practices and become representatives for the voices of the people they interact with in relation to transition.

Finally, working with peoples' perspectives, this research challenges the reader to reflect on ways in which peoples' voices, especially young peoples', should be meaningfully incorporated into decisions that affect them. This is important in terms of policy development, where it should be acknowledged that young peoples' perspectives inform and ultimately are informed by what a policy outlines as best practice. This is important in terms of supporting not a few, not some but all young people around transition in the future.

### **6.8: Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, I feel that this research journey has achieved what I set out to achieve. It has been a long and sometimes difficult journey. However, it will have been a very worthwhile journey if it challenges others to move through a series of questions, these being: so what? for what? and finally...now what? It is the urge to go away and reflect on this final question that will ultimately ensure more favourable outcomes for all who move into, move through and hopefully move out of the primary to secondary school transition journey in Ireland.



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## **Appendix 1: Letter to Principal**

“The Arches”,  
Rookery Road,  
Killarney,  
Co. Kerry.

Dear Principal

My name is Seán Nolan. I am an Educational Psychologist and I am currently pursuing a Professional Doctoral Training in Applied Educational and Child Psychology with the University of East London. I also provide a service to the primary school that you manage.

Building on a personal and professional interest in the transition process between primary and secondary school in the Irish context, I propose to carry out an investigation of this process in the South Kerry area. This means that I propose to gain an insight into the experience of every Sixth Class student in the Caherciveen area who is making the transition to Coláiste Na Sceilge in September 2008.

With a view to gaining an insight into the experience of every young person, I propose to gather information, with your consent, from each child in Sixth Class who is about to make the transition from primary to secondary school. I propose to gather this information in the following way:

Dependent on parental/guardian consent, each young person will be invited to fill out a questionnaire relating to their views prior to them making the transition to Coláiste Na Sceilge. This group activity will take place in the primary school setting and with the support of the class teacher. Any information provided by a child will be confidential.

The above information gathering session will take place in a setting familiar to participants and in the presence of a school staff member as agreed by yourself. All information is treated confidentially.

The resulting data will be useful in helping me to achieve the aims of my research, which are as follows:

1. Do young people's experiences of the transition from primary to secondary school have a positive or negative effect on their self-esteem as measured by the self rating self-esteem measure?
2. What factors during the transition journey do some young people attribute to a rise in their self-esteem levels?
3. What factors during the transition journey do some young people attribute to a fall in their self-esteem levels?
4. What do young people tell us about their experience of the primary to secondary school transition journey?

5.What do primary school teachers tell us about their experiences of working with young people who make the transition from primary to secondary school?

6.What do secondary school teachers tell us about their experiences of working with young people who make the transition from primary to secondary school?

7.How can we bridge the gap between primary and secondary school and manage transition in a way that ensures favourable outcomes for all.

As each of these young people is about the make the transition to secondary school, I would be very interested in listening to and learning from what they have to say about the process.

I would like you to be comfortable in the knowledge that neither consent nor non-consent will affect the service I provide as the assigned educational psychologist to you and your school and that you as principal are free to withdraw your school from the research at any time.

Thanking you,

*Seán Nolan* Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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If you are comfortable with me undertaking my proposed research in your school, please sign here:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you do not wish to participate in the proposed research, please sign here:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you are not sure and would like to discuss it further, please ring me at 087/6491840.

## Appendix 2: Letter to Parents

Date to be inserted as appropriate

“The Arches”,  
Rookery Road,  
Killarney,  
Co. Kerry.

Dear Parent/Guardian.

My name is Seán Nolan. I am an Educational Psychologist and I am currently pursuing a Professional Doctoral Training in Applied Educational and Child Psychology with the University of East London. I also provide a service to the primary school that your child attends.

Building on a personal and professional interest in the transition process between primary and secondary school in the Irish context, I propose to carry out an investigation of this process in the South Kerry area. This means that I propose to gain an insight into the experience of every sixth class student in the Caherciveen area who is making the transition to Coláiste Na Sceilge in September 2008.

With a view to gaining an insight into the experience of every young person, I propose to gather information, with your consent, from your son/daughter in the following 3 ways:

1. Your son/daughter will be invited to fill out a questionnaire relating to their self esteem prior to completing their primary school education. This group activity will take place in the primary school setting and with the support of the class teacher. Any information provided by your child will be confidential.
2. Having spent at least two months in Coláiste na Sceilge, your son/daughter will once again be invited to fill out the same questionnaire. This group activity will take place in the primary school setting and with the support of the year Head. Information provided will once again be confidential.
3. Depending on the emerging picture, your son/daughter may be invited to speak about the transition process as they experienced it. This will take place in the secondary school setting. All interviews will be recorded and will take place in view of a staff member.

Each of the above stages will take place in a setting familiar to participants and in the presence of a school staff member who is also familiar to participants. All information is treated confidentially.

The resulting data will be useful in helping me to achieve the aims of my research, which are as follows:



1. Do young people's experiences of the transition from primary to secondary school have a positive or negative effect on their self-esteem as measured by the self rating self-esteem measure?
2. What factors during the transition journey do some young people attribute to a rise in their self-esteem levels?
3. What factors during the transition journey do some young people attribute to a fall in their self-esteem levels?
4. What do young people tell us about their experience of the primary to secondary school transition journey?
5. What do primary school teachers tell us about their experiences of working with young people who make the transition from primary to secondary school?
6. What do secondary school teachers tell us about their experiences of working with young people who make the transition from primary to secondary school?
7. How can we bridge the gap between primary and secondary school and manage transition in a way that ensures favourable outcomes for all.

As your son/daughter is about to make the transition to secondary school, I would be very interested in listening to and learning from what he/she has to say about the process.

I would like you to be comfortable in the knowledge that neither consent nor non-consent will affect your child's schooling and that you and your child are free to withdraw from the research at any time.

Thanking you,

*Seán Nolan* Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you are comfortable with your son/daughter participating in my research, please sign here:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you do not wish for your son/daughter to participate, please sign here:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you are not sure and would like to discuss it further, please ring me at 087/6491840.

## Appendix 3: The Self Description Questionnaire

# SDQII<sup>®</sup>

## Self Description Questionnaire II

All information supplied will be kept strictly confidential								
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<b>NAME:</b> _____	<b>AGE:</b> (years) _____	<b>(mths)</b> _____	<b>DATE:</b> / /
<b>MALE / FEMALE (circle one) PROGRAM:</b> _____		<b>GROUP:</b> _____	

**PLEASE READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST**  
**This is not a test - there are no right or wrong answers.**

This is a chance for you to look at how you think and feel about yourself. It is important that you:

- are honest
- give your own views about yourself, without talking to others
- report how you feel NOW (not how you felt at another time in your life, or how you might feel tomorrow)

Your answers are confidential and will only be used for research or program development. Your answers will not be used in any way to refer to you as an individual.

Use the six-point scale to indicate how true (like you) or how false (unlike you), each statement over the page is as a description of you. Please do not leave any statements blank.

1	2	3	4	5	6
False	Mostly false	More false than true	More true than false	Mostly true	True
Not like me at all; it isn't like me at all					This statement describes me well; it is very much like me

Statement	False					True
01. <b>MATHEMATICS</b> is one of my best subjects	1	2	3	4	5	6
02. Nobody thinks that I am good looking	1	2	3	4	5	6
03. Overall, I have a lot to be proud of	1	2	3	4	5	6
04. I sometimes take things that belong to other people	1	2	3	4	5	6
05. I enjoy things like sports, gym, and dance	1	2	3	4	5	6
06. I am hopeless in <b>ENGLISH</b> classes	1	2	3	4	5	6
07. I am usually relaxed	1	2	3	4	5	6
08. My parents are usually unhappy or disappointed with what I do	1	2	3	4	5	6
09. People come to me for help in most <b>SCHOOL SUBJECTS</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. It is difficult to make friends with members of my own sex	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. People of the opposite sex whom I like, don't like me	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. I often need help in <b>MATHEMATICS</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. I have a nice looking face	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. Overall, I am no good	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. I am honest	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. I am lazy when it comes to things like sports and hard physical exercise	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. I look forward to <b>ENGLISH</b> classes	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. I worry more than I need to	1	2	3	4	5	6

19.	I get along well with my parents	1	2	3	4	5	6
20.	I am too stupid at school to get into a good university	1	2	3	4	5	6
21.	I make friends easily with boys	1	2	3	4	5	6
22.	I make friends easily with girls	1	2	3	4	5	6
23.	I look forward to <b>MATHEMATICS</b> classes	1	2	3	4	5	6
24.	Most of my friends are better looking than I am	1	2	3	4	5	6
25.	Most things I do, I do well	1	2	3	4	5	6
26.	I sometimes tell lies to stay out of trouble	1	2	3	4	5	6
27.	I am good at things like sports, gym, and dance	1	2	3	4	5	6
28.	I do badly on tests that need a lot of <b>READING</b> ability	1	2	3	4	5	6
29.	I don't get upset very easily	1	2	3	4	5	6
30.	It is difficult for me to talk to my parents	1	2	3	4	5	6
31.	If I work really hard I could be one of the best students in my school year	1	2	3	4	5	6
32.	Not many people of my own sex like me	1	2	3	4	5	6
33.	I am not very popular with members of the opposite sex	1	2	3	4	5	6
34.	I have trouble understanding anything with <b>MATHEMATICS</b> in it	1	2	3	4	5	6
35.	I am good looking	1	2	3	4	5	6
36.	Nothing I do ever seems to turn out right	1	2	3	4	5	6
37.	I always tell the truth	1	2	3	4	5	6
38.	I am awkward at things like sports, gym, and dance	1	2	3	4	5	6
39.	Work in <b>ENGLISH</b> classes is easy for me	1	2	3	4	5	6
40.	I am often depressed and down in the dumps	1	2	3	4	5	6
41.	My parents treat me fairly	1	2	3	4	5	6
42.	I get bad marks in most <b>SCHOOL SUBJECTS</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
43.	I am popular with boys	1	2	3	4	5	6
44.	I am popular with girls	1	2	3	4	5	6
45.	I enjoy studying for <b>MATHEMATICS</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
46.	I hate the way I look	1	2	3	4	5	6
47.	Overall, most things I do turn out well	1	2	3	4	5	6
48.	Cheating on a test is OK if I do not get caught	1	2	3	4	5	6
49.	I am better than most of my friends at things like sports, gym, and dance	1	2	3	4	5	6
50.	I am not very good at <b>READING</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
51.	Other people get more upset about things than I do	1	2	3	4	5	6
52.	I have lots of arguments with my parents	1	2	3	4	5	6
53.	I learn things quickly in most <b>SCHOOL SUBJECTS</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
54.	I do not get along very well with boys	1	2	3	4	5	6
55.	I do not get along very well with girls	1	2	3	4	5	6
56.	I do badly in tests of <b>MATHEMATICS</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
57.	Other people think I am good looking	1	2	3	4	5	6
58.	I don't have much to be proud of	1	2	3	4	5	6
59.	Honesty is very important to me	1	2	3	4	5	6
60.	I try to get out of sports and physical education classes whenever I can	1	2	3	4	5	6
61.	<b>ENGLISH</b> is one of my best subjects	1	2	3	4	5	6
62.	I am a nervous person	1	2	3	4	5	6
63.	My parents understand me	1	2	3	4	5	6
64.	I am stupid at most <b>SCHOOL SUBJECTS</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
65.	I have good friends who are members of my own sex	1	2	3	4	5	6
66.	I have lots of friends of the opposite sex	1	2	3	4	5	6
67.	I get good marks in <b>MATHEMATICS</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
68.	I am ugly	1	2	3	4	5	6
69.	I can do things as well as most people	1	2	3	4	5	6
70.	I sometimes cheat	1	2	3	4	5	6
71.	I can run a long way without stopping	1	2	3	4	5	6
72.	I hate <b>READING</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
73.	I often feel confused and mixed up	1	2	3	4	5	6
74.	I do not like my parents very much	1	2	3	4	5	6

75.	I do well in tests in most <b>SCHOOL SUBJECTS</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
76.	Most boys try to avoid me	1	2	3	4	5	6
77.	Most girls try to avoid me	1	2	3	4	5	6
78.	I never want to take another <b>MATHEMATICS</b> course	1	2	3	4	5	6
79.	I have a good looking body	1	2	3	4	5	6
80.	I feel that my life is not very useful	1	2	3	4	5	6
81.	When I make a promise I keep it	1	2	3	4	5	6
82.	I hate things like sports, gym, and dance	1	2	3	4	5	6
83.	I get good marks in <b>ENGLISH</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
84.	I get upset easily	1	2	3	4	5	6
85.	My parents really love me a lot	1	2	3	4	5	6
86.	I have trouble with most <b>SCHOOL SUBJECTS</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
87.	I make friends easily with members of my own sex	1	2	3	4	5	6
88.	I get a lot of attention from members of the opposite sex	1	2	3	4	5	6
89.	I have always done well in <b>MATHEMATICS</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
90.	If I really try I can do all most anything I want to do	1	2	3	4	5	6
91.	I often tell lies	1	2	3	4	5	6
92.	I have trouble expressing myself when I try to write something	1	2	3	4	5	6
93.	I am a calm person	1	2	3	4	5	6
94.	I am good at most <b>SCHOOL SUBJECTS</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
95.	I have few friends of the same sex as myself	1	2	3	4	5	6
96.	I hate <b>MATHEMATICS</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
97.	Overall, I am a failure	1	2	3	4	5	6
98.	People can really count on me to do the right thing	1	2	3	4	5	6
99.	I learn things quickly in <b>ENGLISH</b> classes	1	2	3	4	5	6
100.	I worry about a lot of things	1	2	3	4	5	6
101.	Most <b>SCHOOL SUBJECTS</b> are just too hard for me	1	2	3	4	5	6
102.	I enjoy spending time with my friends of the same sex	1	2	3	4	5	6

Appendix 4: Young Person Consent Form

## School Transition and Self-esteem

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After class groupings are provided with age appropriate information, using age and ability appropriate language, on the nature of my research, each prospective participant will be invited to record his/her consent to participate in the research.

Consent will mean that each young person was comfortable with participating in the research, understood what the research entailed for them as participants and had an understanding that they were in control of their willingness to continue to participate in the future.

---

I am willing to take part in this research and I know all about it from speaking with Seán.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 5: Reminder Letter to Parents

Date to be inserted as appropriate

“The Arches”,  
Rookery Road,  
Killarney,  
Co. Kerry.

Dear Parent/Guardian.

I am contacting you again at this time to remind you that your son/daughter will once again in the near future be invited to participate in the next phase of my ongoing research. Please see a copy of the original letter you received.

Please contact me if you wish at 087/6491840.

Thanking you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sean Nolan".

Date to be inserted as appropriate

Appendix 6: Transition Questionnaire

**Transition**

Hi again everyone. Nice to meet with you again to follow up on our exploration of transition and what the transition from primary to secondary school has been like for you. I would be grateful if you would answer the following questions just like you did the last time. Remember...

- Your views will be helpful in helping us understand what transition is like for young people, what we can learn and how we can make the transition better for everyone.
- You don't have to take part if you don't want to.
- You can stop at any time
- There are no right or wrong answers-only your answers.
- This is confidential...except in a case where I feel you are telling me something that indicates to me that you are at risk

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- Can you think of a word that best describes how the transition from primary school to secondary school was for you?

[Empty box for answer]

- I used this word because

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- What would you say was the hardest thing about the transition and why?

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- Can you think of three things that you really missed about primary school

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

- Can you remember three things that you found really different about secondary school when you first started?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

- What do you feel are the biggest changes between primary and secondary school?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

- Can you think of some things about primary school that you would like to see in secondary school?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

- Can you think of three things that the primary school could have done **(while you were in primary school)** to better prepare you for the transition?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_



- Can you think of three things that the secondary school could have been done while you were in primary school to better prepare you for the transition?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

- Can you think of three things that the secondary school could have been done **after** you started in secondary school that would have made it easier for you?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

- Can you think of the things (if any) that worry you about life in your new secondary school?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

- Can you think of any things that the school could do **now** to support you better?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

- If you were going through it again, what might you do differently?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

- What advice would you give to people who are in sixth class now?

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- On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate how successful the transition was for you

(1 being not successful at all and 10 being totally successful)

This could be brought up to a 10 by...

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**Thank you for your time and best of luck...**

## Appendix 7 : Reminder Letter to Parents

Date to be inserted as appropriate

“The Arches”,  
Rookery Road,  
Killarney,  
Co. Kerry.

Dear Parent/Guardian.

I am once again asking for your consent to involve your son/daughter in the next and final stage of my research.

This stage involves your son daughter/son asking some general questions about their experience of the transition from primary to secondary school. This information will help me to build a framework for transition for other students in the future.

This activity will take place in the secondary school setting and with the support of the class teacher. Any information provided by your child will be confidential.

I am very interested in listening to and learning from what your son/daughter has to say about the process.

Thanking you once again.

*Seán Nolan*

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If you are comfortable with your son/daughter participating in my research, please sign here:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you do not wish for your son/daughter to participate, please sign here:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please contact me if you wish at 087/6491840.

## Appendix 8: Young People Semi-structured Interview Schedule

The following questions will provide valuable information and act as a stimulus exploration of themes that may arise in each interview setting.

This framework will be applied to both cohorts and discussion before the interview will address changes in self esteem levels and exploration of any factors in the transition process that may have contributes to these changes.

- How would you describe your transition from primary to secondary school? It may be helpful if you could think of 3 words to describe the transition and explain each word afterwards.
- What aspects of the transition did you find most difficult and why?
- Describe any positive experiences you may have had during the transition period.
- Describe some of the negative experiences you may have had during the transition period
- Can you describe anything the primary school could have done to better prepare you for the transition.
- Can you think of any thing the new school could have done to prepare you for the transition
- Can you describe anything the new school could have done to make this period better for you once you had started school there.
- If you were to be making the transition again, what would you do differently?
- What advice if any would you give to sixth class students who are about to make the move from primary to secondary school?

**Appendix 9a: Young Person Interview Transcript-Increase in Self - Esteem**

Q -Researcher Question R- Young person's response
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Q. **In your own words could you explain to me or tell me what was the transition between primary and secondary school like for you**

R. Well going from primary to secondary well I have a brother in fifth year so it wasn't too bad, even though he kind of did ignore me. During summer we had a course we all got to know each other so it wasn't like going into the other classes where I only knew one or two people I actually knew them all, so that was good and with the band and home etc you get to see other people so yeah from a point of view of getting a friend it was fine

Q. **so it sounds as if it was a positive experience for you, is there anything about it that you didn't find so nice**

R. When I came in first we had no lockers and things like that so when your in first year you can't go up to the shops so didn't know what to do so I found that very boring because we would be in for about half an hour, forty minutes and we would just stand. It was alright for the people that knew each other from football and other things and I'm not a very sporty person so yeah they had a lot of things to talk about and me and three or four friends that I had used to just stand there, so then we got lockers and then we used all go to each others lockers and that got a load of time wasted and then we started going for just a walk around the yard and things got much easier

Q. **So was there lots of adjustment**

R. Yeah, didn't really know what to do

Q. **Was that aspect of it very different from primary school?**

R. Yeah because in the mornings at primary school yeah you'd be in for half an hour but then we'd just go outside and play but no one plays anymore

Q. **So is it true to say there were periods of time when you felt bored**

R. Yeah

Q. **What would you do differently if you were going through the whole thing again?**

R. I wouldn't be so nervous cos you know there's like a myth of the sixth years bullying and all this kind of thing, they were perfectly fine, they kind of annoyed you more than anything else, some people would be very nervous of things especially I have a friend and he's quite small, he thought he'd get picked on for the height but no he's perfect, it's just that you expect different things that actually happen

Q. **So the first thing you said there is don't be nervous which is excellent the second thing which is very interesting is the whole idea of the myth. What sort of myths used ye hear before ye came in**

R. We used to hear sixth years and fifth years would pick on you, older children but no they are very nice

- Q. **What advice if any would you give to sixth class waiting to make the big transition?**
- R. Choose your extra subjects not just cos your friends are doing them but cos you actually like them, you can switch over my friends were doing art but they switched to music after Christmas but they were quite behind so if you kind of pick the ones you are good at and not the teachers as well that you like
- Q. **Okay any other advice?**
- R. don't be nervous, even thought that's easier said than done
- Q. **Would you have been nervous beforehand?**
- R. Yeah even though the first day we came in it was just second years and first years so it wasn't too bad and then gradually the fifth and sixth years came in so we got a bit used to it
- Q. **And what sort of things might you have been nervous about?**
- R. Just the new building and getting lost, I remember one day going to English and I lost my class and I was just walking around and didn't know where to go and we didn't have a timetable at the time and so I just asked them
- Q. **Was it a bit hard to come in and not have a timetable?**
- R. Yeah, we got it then gradually but we got it day by day and then we got a full one
- Q. **Do you think that was a good idea to get it gradually?**
- R. Yeah it kind of introduced you to the first three classes and things
- Q. **Now you'll be interested to know that when I compared your two questionnaires that your self esteem went up when you came into secondary school would you think that's a true reflection.**
- R. Well I was like the oldest and biggest in primary school so all the small people looked up to me in junior classes, so it was very difficult at the start cos I was just the small person as you would be but it got way easier it was fine then
- Q. **And what is it, what particular parts or what factors might have helped you to gradually feel better about yourself?**
- R. There was a couple of sixth years that I knew from primary school and they started talking to me and I was brought into other classes to do for instance modelling for junior certs I got to know more people then and through the science projects and things
- Q. **So it really sounds as if your self esteem went up in response to making new friends and meeting new people**
- R. Yeah don't just stick to your class, try and expand
- Q. **Is there lots of opportunity to try and meet new people?**
- R. Yes, especially cos if you have five friends and they are all absent one day, you will be alone so try and make as much friends as you can and even with the first years this year make friends with the first years next year as well. I remember there were a couple of fifth years and sixth years from my primary school and they didn't say anything to me like but there were a couple who did and I thought that was really nice and I'm trying to be nice to the first years now

**Appendix 9b: Young Person Interview Transcript-Decrease in Self Esteem**

Q -Researcher Question R- Yung person's response
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- Q. In general how would you describe the from primary to secondary school
- R. It's a big change
- Q. What did you find were the biggest changes?
- R. Having nine classes a day and a longer day
- Q. What would you do differently if you were to do anything differently now looking back or if you'd like any other support, what could have made the transition better for you
- R. When I was in sixth class I didn't want to come to secondary school, I don't know why I was really worried and now looking back I wouldn't get worried there's nothing to get worried about
- Q. So that's good advice you'd advise other people not to be worried that it all works out. Is there anything that the primary school could have done differently to help you there?
- R. More subjects
- Q. Is there anything that the secondary school could have done differently to prepare you?
- R. We came in for one day but I think we should have come in for a few more
- Q. So you found the one day good. Now the big thing that I want to talk to you about remember you filled in a questionnaire when you where in sixth and then you filled in a questionnaire lately when I compare the two it would have looked that your self esteem was higher in primary school and it seemed to drop a little bit when you came to secondary school, could you explain in your own way why that might have happened, would you feel that's right you felt more confident in primary and then when you came into secondary it dropped just a little bit, nothing to worry about now
- R. Yeah I suppose I was way more confident we had small class, there was only nine in my class and now there's a huge class, we're still kind of getting used to it ready to be honest, well I am
- Q. So that was a big thing you found the size of the classes and I suppose you knew everybody in your last class
- R. Yeah and I knew the school as well
- Q. And what did you find difficult about that Sarah was there anything in particular you found about meeting new people?
- R. I think it was just the fact that it was a bigger school, longer day, more teachers
- Q. And are you slowly getting back to the confident person that you would have been?
- R. Yeah
- Q. For any people now in Sixth class what advice would you give those?
- R. Don't get worried at all, there's nothing to worry about

- Q. And what sort of things were you worried about can you remember?  
R. I really don't know, I remember I just didn't want to come in to secondary school at all
- Q. And did any of your friends feel like that?  
R. No, they all wanted to go in, maybe it's just me
- Q. Are you a bit of a worrier in general?  
R. Yeah
- Q. How are you finding it now?  
R. It's fine
- Q. What do you find the hardest part of it?  
R. The subjects... well we had a choice and I picked t Science and History ...oh my God
- Q. Are you going to stick with it now at this stage?  
R. Yeah I'll stay
- Q. Anything else you'd like to say about the transition between primary and secondary school  
R. No



## Appendix 10: Reminder Letter to Primary School Principals

Date to be inserted as appropriate

“The Arches”,  
Rookery Road,  
Killarney,  
Co. Kerry.

Dear Principal

My name is Seán Nolan. I am an Educational Psychologist and I am currently pursuing a Professional Doctoral Training in Applied Educational and Child Psychology with the University of East London. I also provide a service to the primary school and secondary school in your area.

Building on a personal and professional interest in the transition process between primary and secondary school in the Irish context, I decided to carry out an investigation of this process in the South Kerry area. The aims of my research are as follows:

1. Do young people’s experiences of the transition from primary to secondary school have a positive or negative effect on their self-esteem as measured by the self rating self-esteem measure?
2. What factors during the transition journey do some young people attribute to a rise in their self-esteem levels?
3. What factors during the transition journey do some young people attribute to a fall in their self-esteem levels?
4. What do young people tell us about their experience of the primary to secondary school transition journey?
5. What do primary school teachers tell us about their experiences of working with young people who make the transition from primary to secondary school?
6. What do secondary school teachers tell us about their experiences of working with young people who make the transition from primary to secondary school?
7. How can we bridge the gap between primary and secondary school and manage transition in a way that ensures favourable outcomes for all.

Phase 1 and 2, which have now been completed, gained an insight into the experiences of Sixth Class students, in the Caherciveen area, who made the transition to Coláiste Na Sceilge in September 2008.

In the next and final phase of my research, I propose to gain an insight into the views and experiences of primary teachers who work with young people on a daily basis. Therefore I would be very interested in meeting with a teacher from your school and listening to their experiences around student transition.

Therefore, I now invite you and your staff to explore whether a teacher would be willing to meet with me to talk about their experience of the transition from primary to secondary school. This information will help me to build a framework for transition for other students in the future.

As the date and venue are not confirmed at this stage, I will contact you with details at a later stage. At this stage I would be very grateful if you could bring this to the attention of your staff. If a teacher is interested in participating in this research I would also be grateful if you pass on this letter so that they can sign the attached and pop into the SAE provided.

Please know that you are under no obligation to participate and you can withdraw from this process at any stage, should d you wish to do so.

Thanking you,

*Sean Nolan*

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I am interested in participating in the proposed interview and would like you to contact me when the venue and date have been finalised.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 11: Primary Teacher Semi-structured Interview Schedule**

The following questions will provide valuable information and act as a stimulus exploration of themes that may arise in each interview setting.

- In your experience, how do our young people cope with the transition from primary to secondary school?
- What are the aspects of transition that they find most challenging?
- What are the aspects that they experience as positive?
- What are the most difficult issues around the transition that you experience?
- What are your concerns around transition if indeed you have any?
- What are your school's current practices in supporting young people around transition?
- What works well in your opinion?
- What could we do differently in your opinion?
- How can we bridge the gap that sometimes exists between the primary and the secondary school?
- What are the challenges you face in making these changes?
- What role if any can the Educational Psychologist play in this process?

## Appendix 12: Primary School Teacher Interview Transcript.

S: Sean-researcher  
I: Interviewee:  
Word count: 3,000

S: Okay, thank you very much for participating. I want to have a conversation with you around the transition between primary and secondary. In your experience, as a person who works with young people as they make the transition from primary to secondary school, how do you feel they cope with the transition?

I: They don't always get the same support when they go into secondary, as they do here. Here we possibly have more time to give them, the support they need, especially if they are not allocated hours

S: Fantastic

I: Whereas they are not always given that when they go into secondary so they have to fight for themselves a lot of the time

S: Okay. And what sort of implications what are the implications of that change for them do you think?

I: Well, I suppose they can start falling behind very quickly.

S: Okay

I: You know, if they are getting the help then all of a sudden they are into different classes, different teachers, and I suppose they are not known. Their needs aren't looked after as much. I think it's just got the potential for them to fall behind very quickly

S: Excellent. And particularly like there when you said "not known", tell me a little more, what do you mean by "not known"?

I: Well again, I suppose, they are coming from a school like this, where every teacher knows them. The resource teacher knows them, everything about them. You know, they go into secondary, they are going from different teacher, and they are going from class to class. Obviously some reference will have gone with them but I mean they are not really going to know, what their needs are, what their background is. I mean that sometimes is relevant, you know what they are dealing with at home, what's going on.

S: Super, thank you for that. Now, you've touched on a few of them there maybe already but could you tell me, what are the aspects of transition that you think or in your experience you might think they would find most challenging about the transition

I: Em, I suppose really again going back to not knowing, the teachers not having the same relationship, you know the big school. They might not meet their friends. They could be separated from them. They all usually get on but I think they are the things they have to deal with. They have lockers. I mean some kids aren't very well able to look after their own stuff. They don't have someone telling them to take out this book now, they have to go to their locker, they return without it. The whole vastness of the school. And I know they all have teachers and year heads but like it's not the same I think, you just hear back from them that it's having so many teachers, so many places to be, finding themselves.

S: Okay, that's excellent, thank you. Now what are the flip side of that or what are the aspects that you think they experience as positive, about the move, if indeed if you can see any positive in it.

I: Well, I guess there's a lot more opportunities for them. I suppose a lot of children in primary school don't experience subjects that you know, it might be only that they are very musical or they are very artistic, there are so many hours allocated to in primary school but I mean they can take that as a subject on their own in secondary school and I think they might find where their strong points are. They can get into the different societies, choirs, musicals, debating. There's more opportunity, I think, maybe, for children who aren't into sport, the more traditional things that aren't dealt with in primary school.

S: Excellent. Now, what are the most difficult issues around the transition that you as a teacher experience if indeed you've come across any? Does it create any difficulties for you when you are working with children who are coming into transition or any aspects of transition that you come across in your professional life? Do they create any difficulties for you, as a teacher?

I: Em, not really. I can't really....you know I think, I suppose you try and prepare the children as much as possible and like they have there in, don't know, March or February maybe, they went in for a day and they went in on the bus and they experienced the whole secondary school and came back. You know we try and reassure them about any worries they did have but really they are very positive when they come back, I think. I suppose you would like to think, I suppose you don't want them going into secondary school with, you know a label or anything but at the same time you would like to think they are getting the support, but you don't really get any feedback from that as such.

S: Okay. What are your concerns around transition, if indeed you have any? Is there anything that you don't get feedback from the kids, but as a teacher of these young people what would concern you maybe about the transition?

I: Em, are we talking now learning support resource kids or just in general.

S: Whichever

I: Whichever, yeah. I suppose really with the kids I deal with I would just be worried, you know you'd like to know exactly what support they get when they go on. Or you know, how they've done, or like, yea as I said you don't want to be sending a report with them or anything but at the same time you'd like to know that they are getting a bit of help, but I suppose it would kind of concern you that maybe when they get there they are just dropped in it. But at the same time, you know when they do entrance exams and things like that, although it's not relevant as much around here that they are, they don't get a chance really to prove themselves. It's both sided really. It's a difficult one.

S: So, you're thinking that in some ways you'd like a structure where you can get feedback on the kids, from the other side, once they go to the other side.

I: Yea, and that's I suppose, people wouldn't be afraid to ask us, from the secondary school, what exactly is it, without sending them with a "oh this is report" but what would they need in general.

S: So is it kind of more information and more joined up thinking around

I: Yea, I think a bit more, working together more

S: Okay. Can you think what are your current school practices in supporting your people around transition at the moment?

I: Yea, well, as I said they go in around March maybe for a day. They go in on the bus, they experience the whole thing and they mix with some of the kids from the other areas as well I think, maybe, three or four areas go in together and they get to meet them. They go through the whole day and they're all raving about they do things like Home Economics and they make buns, and it's nice for them. And I think that's really helps them. It's not as daunting for them 1<sup>st</sup> September when the bus is coming to collect them and they have a longer day and all that. I think yea on this side again we just try to help them if they have any questions, try to answer them as best you can but I think really just the experience of it is just the best way.

S: Okay. And does this work well in your opinion? Are the current structures set in place, are they working well?

I: Yea I think so, I mean most of them now come back after that day, they are full of it, you know, they love it, they can't wait to go and they already met knew friends there and everything which is great.

S: That's great. So they sound kind of excited and ready to go?

I: Whereas they were scared

S: Really, that's great isn't it?

I: Yea. I often find by this time they are ready to go. Like, I think, from Easter on most of them, I know you will have the exception, but most of them are very excited about it and it and it's nearly time for them to move on.

S: I wonder what is it about that particular day that makes them kind of move from being scared to the other side of that which is being excited.

I: I think you know, they go in, they realize it's not as daunting as they thought, the teachers are nice. You know they hear stories from their older brothers and sisters and stuff. "The school is huge, you won't know what class room to go to, you won't know..." But I think what they do with them that day is nice practical stuff, so it relaxes them.

S: Excellent. Now is there anything in your opinion that could be done differently. Is there anything that you think is lacking or that might be done in a different way or something new that could be done

I: Em, not really. No I think that day works well. No, not really

S: Can you think of anyone, who maybe, didn't cope with the transition so well. Have you ever had feedback from somebody who just didn't go well for them?

I: Well, now I'd be talking about Dublin now, you know it's just my first year. I would have had, yea, definitely kids that I think a lot of it would have been down to, we would have sent out report forms and stuff, you know, given out a hand written report before they came because in Dublin say, all schools would have come to us with a list of the kids. Now that hasn't happened around here, or at least I haven't seen it and we'd of had to go through each kid. And I think they kind of went in then with a tag or a label And you try, you know, you wouldn't give too much information, you know because you want to give every child a clean slate but I have seen situations where they've gone in and I think the school is nearly waiting for them. You know.

S: Really, that's interesting and it's interesting that you said it doesn't happen here it's more in another area.

I: Yea

S: So different processes or frameworks do take place in different areas I suppose, do they?

I: Yes, exactly

S: Do you see this part down here as being different?

I: Different, Eh, no I think its better. You know. And again I suppose you see here, you've one school, and that's it

S: Yea, that's interesting

I: Whereas in Dublin they are coming to you trying to find out. And I know they are meant to accept everybody and all that but it doesn't always happen after entrance exams, after they coming and talking to the teacher you know, things like that. I suppose here every child moves to Colaiste na Sceilge and that's it, so I think they are treated more fairly, you know, in a way.

S: You mentioned clean slate there earlier which comes up an awful lot in the literature. Do you think that's a good thing?

I: Oh yea, definitely. I think it's very important every child goes and as I said in one way if they need support or they need whatever but I don't think any child should be going in with the baggage. You know what's happened in primary school has happened and you know let them start afresh and see what happens. You know that they're not going in with "he's such and such's brother, or he's" you know that kind of thing and that's what I've seen a lot. Or that you know they can get into that school because..... you know so I think a clean slate is very important. Because often secondary school is a fresh beginning for them, whatever problems they've had they don't occur at all. They you know settle into secondary school, it suits them better.

S: Excellent. And what is it, do you think, why might it suit them better?

I: Again I think maybe some children adapt better to be, not having being fed, you know that there's someone in their face all the time. Maybe, they work better independently; they find a niche for themselves. You know, something that wasn't catered for maybe in primary school, you know, maybe and that there are more opportunities for them. I suppose different friends as well. I suppose in fairness when you have only a few in your class, kind of you are friends with them or your not. Whereas when you go into secondary school you meet all types of different people, maybe someone that's more suited to you.

S: You've mentioned friends a good few times. Em do you think that's a very important aspect of transition?

I: Yea, oh definitely I think that. You know I mean. You see it in all ages. People make friends in secondary school that are their friends for life. They might never again be friends with people from primary school. And vice versa sometimes there are primary school friends that are friends for life but em you will often see children maybe that had problems in primary school, didn't get on, bullying, you know whatever. They go to secondary and they might not be friends with them at all, meet people from different areas, different walks of life, they settle down. It's very important.

S: Now is there anything that you think that secondary school could do. You've mentioned an awful lot about it already but is there anything more specific that you think they could do to make the transition easier for these young people?



I: From what I see, especially from Colaiste na Sceilge, I think they are doing a good enough job. You know I'm new now to the area, but from what I've seen it is working out pretty well, like you know. They bring them in then in September in different stages, I think first years go in on their own you know so they get into the school with only a few and gradually over the week it builds up so there not thrown in on day one with six hundred pupils, or whatever it is. They kind of have a day to themselves, to feel their way around and then gradually all the other classes come back. No I don't really; I think it's working well enough.

S: And do you have any insight into what you think the kids might miss from here when they go in. What are the aspects of primary school?

I: Security.

S: Really?

I: Yea.

S: Excellent. And could you just tell me a bit more about that.

I: You know, like as I said, some children need to get out of it because they need however some children just need to be looked after, even like I've 2 kids, from the same family that are going in and one of them can't wait the other one, is not looking forward to it at all

S: Really

I: And they really look out for each other but again I think one of them needs more looking after and she just.....you know I think it's good for them, they still have to move on, it's just some of them like to be spoon fed , they know the teachers, it's security really

S: That's good. Em, in the literature we talk about bridging the gap between primary and secondary, you've eluded to it earlier. Is there anything that we could do to bridge the gap in a greater way between primary and secondary?

Em, I don't know, I suppose like there could be some sort of a kinda, don't know what you'd call them, course, that they would go in maybe, when they'd be in 6th class, where they'd go in on Saturdays, Place for high achievers, if Colaiste na Sceilge was more open, I don't mean that they would go in and out but maybe some courses on a Saturday, or on an evening

S: Are you perhaps suggesting that it should be seen more of a gradual process

Yea, I think that would make it easier for them, Yeah.

S: Ok - a final question...Do you think the Educational Psychologist has any role to play in the primary to secondary school transition?

I: I think, that, I know I said earlier that I don't like to look at them going in with labels or whatever, but at the same time I think then it would be their job to monitor that child because they've know them since from primary school and when their in secondary school they can keep an eye on them and see how they are getting on, without maybe in secondary school they don't have any problem, they think they are fine, they think they are getting on grand, that's where the psychologist can see how is such a person doing or just in case they are slipping through the net there and they still do need, you know, but again I think that would be important

S: That's wonderful, again thank you very much, you've given me tons of information there so thank you very much for that

I: No problem

S: Thank you very much, bye bye.

## Appendix 13: Reminder Letter to Secondary School Teachers

Date to be inserted as appropriate

“The Arches”,  
Rookery Road,  
Killarney,  
Co. Kerry.

Dear Teacher.

My name is Seán Nolan. I am an Educational Psychologist and I am currently pursuing a Professional Doctoral Training in Applied Educational and Child Psychology with the University of East London. I also provide a service to the primary school and secondary school in your area.

Building on a personal and professional interest in the transition process between primary and secondary school in the Irish context, I decided to carry out an investigation of this process in the South Kerry area. The aims of my research are as follows:

1. Do young people’s experiences of the transition from primary to secondary school have a positive or negative effect on their self-esteem as measured by the self rating self-esteem measure?
2. What factors during the transition journey do some young people attribute to a rise in their self-esteem levels?
3. What factors during the transition journey do some young people attribute to a fall in their self-esteem levels?
4. What do young people tell us about their experience of the primary to secondary school transition journey?
5. What do primary school teachers tell us about their experiences of working with young people who make the transition from primary to secondary school?
6. What do secondary school teachers tell us about their experiences of working with young people who make the transition from primary to secondary school?
7. How can we bridge the gap between primary and secondary school and manage transition in a way that ensures favourable outcomes for all.

Phase 1 and 2, which have now been completed, gained an insight into the experiences of sixth class students in the Caherciveen who made the transition to Coláiste Na Sceilge in September 2008.

In the next and final phase of my research, I propose to gain an insight into the views and experiences of secondary school teachers who work with

young people on a daily basis. Therefore I would be very interested in meeting with you and listening to your experiences around student transition.

Therefore, I now invite you to attend a focus group meeting which will be held in the near future. This group will be comprised of 10 colleagues, some of whom you may know. We will then discuss and explore the nature of transition. This information will help me to build a framework for transition for other students in the future.

As the date and venue are not confirmed at this stage, I will contact you with details at a later stage. However, at this point, I would appreciate if you could indicate your interest in participating in this focus group. Please sign the attached below and pop into the SAE provided.

Please know that you are under no obligation to participate and you can withdraw from this process at any stage, should d you wish to do so.

Thanking you,

*Seán Nolan*

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I am interested in participating in the proposed focus group and would like you to contact me when the venue and date have been finalised

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 14: Secondary School Teacher Focus Group Schedule

The following questions will provide valuable information and act as a stimulus exploration of themes that may arise in each interview setting.

- In your experience, how do our young people cope with the transition from primary to secondary school?
- What are the aspects of transition that they find most challenging?
- What are the aspects that they experience as positive?
- What are the most difficult issues around the transition that you experience?
- What are your concerns around transition if indeed you have any?
- What are your school's current practices in supporting young people around transition?
- What works well in your opinion?
- What could we do differently in your opinion?
- How can we bridge the gap that sometimes exists between the primary and the secondary school?
- What are the challenges you face in making these changes?
- What role if any can the Educational Psychologist play in this process?

## Appendix 15 : Secondary School Teacher Focus Group Transcript

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R=Researcher

J=Jack

P=Pat

S=Sue

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Thanks very much for agreeing to do these interviews about the transition between primary and secondary school, so a few questions for ye

- R. In your experience how do you feel young people cope with the transition between primary and secondary school?
- J. I think sometimes maybe the parents worry more about it than students. The students look forward to the change.
- R. Very good, excellent, and in your experience would you say that all of them cope very well?
- J. Each year a certain few maybe don't make the transition so well, it depends on how you talk about transition, in other words, for the first few days yes there are people who are apprehensive, if you go back a month later everything seems to be running smoothly.
- R. What in your opinion would be the aspects of transition that they might find the most challenging?
- J. Well we, as you may be aware, visit schools beforehand. It depends on the size of the building and the number of teachers and changing rooms, all those kinds of situations. They voice their opinions... let's put it that way to you. Having said that, I always get a feel, as well for that matter, much earlier than I speak to all the first year's during the first year to try and pick up so we can determine if there are any issues and we usually find that within about 2-4 weeks all those issues have been sorted.
- R. So your saying there that basically for the first month there might be issues around getting used to the new building and all of that
- J. Basically worrying that they won't find W6 or T9 whatever the case may be or maybe a little pressure of rushing from one classroom to another where obviously they have been inside in a room for the last few years in the school they came from. But that's normal
- P. Another thing, they do get excited every day and it takes them a little while to organise their timetable and say I don't need all my books today I'll just bring the ones I have and then they get a lot better organised, but sometimes they need a little bit of time to go out to their locker, more than the other students, just to get used to the idea of the timetable, there are so many new things coming at them, new teachers, new subjects, even new classmates and I think it's all that... and I find that when we're out in the corridor watching and you see a student saying I don't know where my class is gone now and what we do there is we say show me your timetable and we find out from that or we go to the office and say ask Gerry or Mary where your class are. It's just little things like that but after 3 weeks I would say that's all gone.

- New teachers have that coming to the school in September; they are in the same dilemma wondering where their class is.
- R. What are the aspects that they would experience as very positive, would ye feel, in the transition?
- J. I'll start off there, I meet the kids in the spring term of the year and I have had informal conversations such as how have things gone with you, what could we as a group have done better to effectively change things, usually they say nothing in the sense that strikes them, maybe to a certain extent I should have asked that question before Christmas because all the senses may be gone from their heads but the fact they physically come into the room beforehand in Feb for 6<sup>th</sup> class, a lot of them visit the school for reasons other than school, they might be community games, they might be in summer camp, football, basketball training, credit union quizzes, all those issues help to alleviate the apprehension and the worry. Yes they have a worry about remembering teachers' names and stuff like that so we purposefully when we give out the timetable we don't even mention the teachers name we say you are doing Irish in such a room and we tell them to totally forget the fact that Mr. O'C. or Mr. O'S. is the teacher
- R. So concentrate on finding the room
- J. The room and the subject that seems to be working
- R. That's very clever I won't have thought of that I would have added on the burden of trying to identify a teacher on top of that
- J. We have two Js, we have I don't know how many Ms, even the teachers themselves get mixed up. I literally heard two teachers yesterday in the timetable discussing it, which of these is you and this is the year heads
- R. So it's confusing for the teachers not to mind the students
- J. Yes so why go down that road at all then, and they will still describe them as the Physics teacher or the Irish teacher of the Woodwork teacher or whatever
- R. It's just a simple solution, excellent. So S. would you have any thoughts on what they might experience as positive?
- S. They love the idea that they are getting a locker, it's a very simple thing, they come in with me in September or October and they love the idea of a locker and putting their books in. It's the neat things they love, the canteen is another thing they find that very exciting and they like that aspect of going down there. They just enjoy meeting new people as well and they feel that they are not in the room all the time and they are not with one teacher all the time. They express the excitement of that, of enjoying the fact they have change. And they are nearly teenagers.
- R. Now we move away from the students a little bit, what are the most difficult issues around transition that ye as teachers experience, if indeed there are any, what are the most difficult aspects of it for ye?
- J. As in we dealing with them
- R. Yeah or just the whole thing of 6<sup>th</sup> into first year, does that create any difficulties or issues for ye, year in year out, or maybe within a particular grouping or within a particular year or does it all just run

- smoothly or does each year have a different challenge for ye in terms of transition
- S. I'd say the only challenge in it is that in the terms of what we refer to as choice subjects, kids find a difficulty in obviously deciding what subjects suit best but that's not our problem in the strict sense of the word, in that there is so many subjects laid down by the Departmental rules. Effectively the child has to pick two but following all that through, I could have to check my notes now to be 100% accurate on this but I'd say less than 5 of the current 70 first years asked to change their choice, but your talking about a very small number whatever about a percentage
- R. So most of them seem to get it right but you might have a few that don't
- S. You'd have people who would let's say like a subject when they visit it first or a sister or brother did it or recommended it and find themselves with a bit more difficulty than what they expected
- R. And then that creates problems I suppose, not huge problems but difficulties in terms of facilitating the move
- S. Normally it doesn't if it's done within the first 3 or 4 weeks but we would always invite the parent in at that stage, in other words we will not allow a child to make that decision on his/her own, always the parent is involved.
- R. So that the idea of the first 3 or 4 weeks came up there again, you would see that as the most crucial there
- J. Well from the choice point of view if they make that decision later than 4 weeks they have missed out by a substantial amount, but kids have now, don't get me wrong, we've had changes around Christmas.
- R. Thank you J
- J. The majority find out very quickly if a subject is for them
- R. Are there any difficulties S. you experience around transition, not difficulties but I suppose issues or concerns
- S. No, you are just keeping an eye of them and seeing if anybody is upset or anything or watching around at the breaks to see are they mingling well with their classmates, it's just keeping an eye out really but other than that I haven't any concerns just keeping a watchful eye, that's the whole key
- R. Good, thank you now, I suppose what would you see as the strengths that your school practises has around transition at the moment. What are the things that you feel you are doing well?
- J. The biggest plus that we did was literally going to the schools before hand, we work a system where a chaplain and year head visit the schools and we look after them when they come into us here for the first few days and the idea behind that is that at least they will recognise two faces in the building that they know are responsible for them or with them which ever term you would like to use. We kind of sell it that way rather than from the point of view of saying this is the school, building whatever, we're saying here are two faces who will look after you to the best of our ability. We have a good link with all the primary schools as well. With the principals and so on if they had any issues or concerns they were aware of they would let us know.
- R. Excellent, thank you J.



- P. On the induction day as well in February, well there are two induction days they will be coming in two different groups we make sure that day that we spend time with them, we go down and talk to them, we even watch them at lunchtime to make sure they have lunch money or they have a lunch with them and we just kind of hang around with them that day and it does make a difference even before they come into the school you could meet them up town or somewhere else and they will say hello to you. They have identified you as being somebody they will be meeting again
- R. And they have an earlier connection then, brilliant. Now what could ye do, if anything, what could ye do differently or is there anything ye ever thought yeah that might just make things a little bit better again, is there anything ye could do differently
- S. Well we have an evening session as well, where the parents of incoming students, back in February around the induction day and that's good I think because as well as seeing the child you see the parents, usually one or both and they will also give an opportunity to express any concerns they have and I think that's a good thing
- J. With regards improving a thing it is easy say you can tap yourself on the back and say no but we have put a lot of work in it for the last ten years so yes we made quite a number of changes initially because we went with the flow and we responded. But as of late I don't think we really have because I go back to what I said earlier, we have asked the kids is there anything we could have done better or differently and they have said No, that they are happy. I suppose on major one I made now in explaining the subject choices rather than getting teachers to do it, I got current first years to do it, now it's edited by the teachers concerned and our thinking and logic behind it is that the current first years were they're sixth class students the previous years, so it brought it to this is what you will think of the subject as opposed to teachers saying so.
- R. The research I've already done listening to peers who have already gone through it is very high on their agenda in creating a positive vibe around coming to school. I'll give ye some more feedback when we are finished. Is there anything ye feel that the primary school could do better, or changes they could make to enhance this whole process for everybody? I understand ye feel ye are doing a very positive job, do you ever feel it might be enhanced even more if the primary schools could make changes that they might be not aware of from their angle?
- P. I can't really, the only thing I did think of one year we usually have a mass in October for the first years and I think we invited the primary school to that and that's to show them how the students are getting on. Maybe something similar could happen in the primary school where the primary team will invite us maybe to some ceremony or concert they have or something. Maybe more of an invitation.
- J. But having said that, a lot of us live locally and we are doing those things I end up in at least 3 primary concerts over a space of a two year cycle. It happens maybe not in a planned sense. All those kids coming in here know at least one person from their locality

- R. And that's kind of the special intimacy of the peninsula down here, the piece of research I'm doing it is very different from all the literature because you've got kids going over and back and from different schools and choosing schools whereas here they have to come into you and they all do, and it's so entwined the community
- J. We have a link which is strange in that we normally "lose" one to two kids each year to boarding schools and so on and there is still a link between those kids and us which sounds strange. I have met them when I have visited open days and kid who would have gone to C. I. would have come across. Again the peninsula effect has a lot to do with it
- R. Is there any way we can bridge the gap between primary and secondary in terms maybe of schools linking around students. Is there anything that can be done differently there? Do you feel you get all the relevant information on kids or do you want more information or do you feel you have a good rich picture of them when they come into ye?
- J. Yes, I actually feel that there is a certain invasion of privacy in a sense of if we went further than what we went and whilst it's helpful to know something about the kid, it's good for the kid to come in unknown, that sounds like a contradiction
- R. That's fine because research would be talking about follow up or fresh start so you're sounding as if a fresh start
- J. For example if a kid has a behavioural type problem I will purposefully not discuss that with the staff beforehand
- R. And what would your reasoning about that be J
- J. My reasoning is give a dog a bad name and finish that yourself, it just doesn't work in fairness and time and time again we have had situation where kids either academically have improved or behaviourally have improved. I think it's quite dangerous to come along because in all due respects a kid in a small pond may have a name for one reason or another, and they will be levelled very quickly when they come into a larger group of 100. And the same will go for discipline and behaviour
- R. I'm just smiling again J., you've touched on another think about the big fish in the small pond becoming the small fish in the big pond and the implications that can have and I hear you saying it isn't good maybe to bring a label.
- J. If at all possible no, obviously the person has a physical problem you have to deal with it whatever way you can, that's totally different.
- R. What do you feel if any role has the educational psychologist have in the transition between primary and secondary, is there something that I could be doing differently, do I have an input or is there any role for me there do you see
- J. I'd say major changes have occurred since you electively have been involved with both primary and secondary because with the previous it was one person involved with secondary and whatever happened with primary we knew nothing about so there is strong link in that you would be aware of situations and obviously how to deal with situations
- R. So there is continuity there
- J. Continuity is worth anything
- R. There is follow on there

- J. That's one of the best things that have happened really in the sense that we would get a certain input maybe from the principals or the teachers but obviously you then from the psychological point of view follow through, understanding and the fact that my mentioning a situation that you can link in with that kid and know what I'm talking about
- R. I suppose I can put a context to it and a story to it. P. do you see the EP has having a role or doing something better
- P. I don't think they could do something better, I suppose the fact that they are there, you know every situation is different you can't just say they should do this or that. I think they respond as well to what happens or each child is different so you can't just sit down and say this should happen or that should happen
- R. I suppose my final question is just looking at the exception did ye ever have a young person who just can't cope with the transition and things just being to fall apart somewhat or deteriorate, have ye ever experienced that sort of young person, and we're talking about any range of difficulties that just seem to crop up because of the transition.
- J. You see, if you had asked me have we come across people who haven't coped the answer is yes but when we put in the word because of the transition I'm inclined to say hold on a second. There is a difference between the two in a sense that I know people have dropped out for reasons but I'm not too sure the transition has anything to do with that
- R. Okay I see what you mean but even if you broaden out the word transition to the kind of change between primary and secondary school, the mere fact they have moved in somewhere in that change. Is there anything related to the change do you think that has impacted negatively on their development or progression or anything like that, even academic performance for example.
- S. I'd say in the overall context I've seen academic performance more improve than disimprove, in the sense of expectations, we have a system here that the primary schools rate children coming in on a ratio of one to five, it's not scientific, it's just how the child is performing relative to his/her peers relative the teachers expectations. We purposefully mix everyone in first year so a one will always end up with a five in that sense. But again like I said earlier, we don't tell the teachers what we have done unless someone has to get actual help and even in the case where they actually have to get help there are not withdrawn until at least November of the first year and at the moment we have only one individual out of seventy receiving learning support. We have others who have a language difficulty and others who are non-nationals and they are getting help from that point of view, English as a spoken language.
- J. can I just ask you what would be the rational behind not sending a pupil to learning support until after November, what's the reasoning there?
- J. If we sent them in the first week, we are going on either a psychological report or an expectation whereas earlier I said we try and let the kids surface to their own level and that seems to be working because kids

who have come in here and I think quite clearly from one letter from a particular individual stating the child had a problem with maths and he got 64% in his Christmas test, he is one person currently in first year so obviously there is some gap somewhere. I have a very happy mother at the moment and I had a very distraught mother last June.

- R. If you had jumped in September and sent him to learning support because of that, the expectation would have gone down, among his peers, his self esteem and all that. So thank you very much for that lads, a whole lot of information there which is wonderful and thank you very much again.

## Appendix 16: Research Journal Excerpts

Some reflections following student interviews.

... a bit worrying that those interviews didn't throw up as much as I thought or had hope they would...should I be really concerned or is this all something to think about and work with as simply a part of the process or research journey that I am on...calm down and it will be fine...

Ok...it isn't as bad as I think. Stop think in the negative and stop thinking in terms of **Quantity,Quantity,Quantity**. I have to respect what the young people have said or not said to me...maybe look deeper into what they didn't say and think about reasons why this might be the case. Yep that is it...look at what they are not saying...think, think, think...

Turn that NAT into a BAT quick Nolan... That's another part of the journey done...that's great isn't it...only teacher interviews to do...hope fully they'll go well...look at all that is going well Seán and though you can't see it now a lot is going very well...try a green one on for size...

Ok...instead of worrying you need to brainstorm and write down some of the reasons that have been coming into your head as to why that SILENCE is there...use it...go with it and think about how you can make this part of the story...

WHY...maybe the kids feel as if there is nothing to discuss...they went through the transition and maybe they wouldn't even be aware of that if I hadn't brought it into their existence...did I bug them...maybe they feel they couldn't talk to me which is sad...maybe they see me as someone who will run back to the dark side with all their thoughts and they'll pay for it...did I do things to relax them...yes I did...was my interviewing boring to them and didn't reach them...god...I though I was good...I need to think about that...great...more to think about as if I haven't enough...

...maybe they just couldn't be bothered talking about something that for them is not a big deal...maybe it is of no concern to them and is simply a journey they travelled without knowing it or being affected by it. Could it be that they were afraid of possible consequences (in their heads) of really talking to me-honestly and truthfully...did issues of POWER come into play...was it my interviewing techniques or the methods I used...if I was doing it again what might I do differently...

## **Appendix 17: Qualitative Research and Trustworthiness**

Literature relating to evaluation and qualitative research abounds with difficulties concerning the nature of the evaluation process and disagreements not only about characteristics that define good quality qualitative research but also whether criteria for quality in qualitative research should exist at all. Many argue that a set of criteria distinct from those applied to natural scientific quantitative approaches and specifically designed for qualitative research is required. However, others have called for an end to “criteriology” (Schwandt, 1996) arguing that this leads to privileging of methods as sacred prescription rooted in positivist philosophical traditions and to a stifling of the interpretative and creative aspects of qualitative research. However, the present writer agrees with Dixon-Woods, Shaw, Agarwal and Smith (2007) who suggest that any set of criteria can provide a reference framework that guides best practice rather than been seen as a rigid prescriptive tool for evaluating all papers.

Research into frameworks for evaluating qualitative research presents one with a vast array to choose from. Most prominent in the literature are sets of criteria as posited by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and more recently by Mays and Pope (1995). The present writer finds these frameworks useful in terms of thinking about the quality of qualitative research. However, suspects an attempt to impose a quantitative framework to evaluating quantitative research. It is almost as if these frameworks strive to evaluate qualitative research in a more favourable and within the wider context of a more robust and scientific quantitative method rather than evaluating qualitative research on its own merits and as an equally respected discipline. These frameworks may unwittingly give one the incorrect impression that qualitative research is less than quantitative research.

Placing value on the interpretative and artistic component of qualitative research methodology, the present writer favours the framework entitled *Desirable Features of Qualitative Research Methods* as developed by Inui and Frankel (1991).

This framework places value on both the methods employed “on the way to the goal” but also the manner in which the attainment of “the goal” is reported. The present writer feels that for any reader of a research paper, sufficient access and insight to both method and overall reporting are vital as it allows the reader to contextual the research in their own minds, make sense of it and draw their own conclusions and interpretations. Inui and Frankel’s framework facilitates such engagement and does so in a manner which acknowledges qualitative research as a methodology in it’s own right and escapes from being over pushy in terms of positivism or drawing too much from language which is closely associated with hard scientific rigour , objectivity and so on.

Inui and Frankel’s (1991) Criteria for Evaluating Qualitative Research

#### **Desirable Features of Qualitative Research Methods**

- Clear and important question
- Appropriate
  - Sampling strategy
  - Data type(s) sources
  - Data gathering methods
  - Analysis methods
- Provision for :
  - Data archiving
  - Investigator/journal keeping
  - Sceptical peer review
  - Subject review
  - Consideration of contrary data/cases

#### **Desirable features of Manuscript Describing Qualitative research Results**

- Description of
  - History of enquiry
  - Investigator’s role, perceptions at research inception
  - All methods elements noted above
- Strong trustworthy inference/conclusions, notable for
  - Richness
  - Coherence, integrity
  - Relatedness, boundedness
  - Salience, verisimilitude
  - Generativity
  - Brevity, clarity, accessibility

Ensuring 'Trustworthiness' in this Research

Criteria	Research Strategies
<b>Credibility/Internal Validity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Triangulation</b></li> <li>• <b>Search for negative cases</b></li> <li>• <b>Subject review</b></li> </ul>
<b>Transferability/External Validity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Detailed description of the research context;</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ <b>Research questions</b></li> <li>➢ <b>Context</b></li> <li>➢ <b>Research design</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Strategies for enhancing rigour</b></li> <li>• <b>Presenting and assessing manuscripts and results</b></li> <li>• <b>Values and objectives guiding the research</b></li> </ul>
<b>Dependability/ Reliability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Data archiving, creating an audit trail</b></li> <li>• <b>Sceptical peer review</b></li> <li>• <b>Triangulation</b></li> </ul>
<b>Confirmability/Objectivity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sceptical peer review or audits</b></li> <li>• <b>Negative cases</b></li> <li>• <b>Research journal</b></li> </ul>



**Appendix 18: SDQ-11 Treated Data Indicating Changes in Transition Self-esteem Levels.**

	SDQ-11 Pre-transition mean score	SDQ-11 Post-transition mean score	Sig.(2-tailed) (Probability Value)	Significant Increase/Decrease/No change
1	3.2970	2.9901	.037	Decrease
2	3.3431	3.2059	.047	Decrease
3	3.6176	3.2451	.013	Decrease
4	3.3235	2.9216	.000	Decrease
5	2.9412	3.4118	.047	Increase
6	2.4314	3.2941	.000	Increase
7	2.9608	3.5000	.000	Increase
8	3.2451	3.4902	.010	Increase
9	3.0980	3.7353	.012	Increase
10	2.8235	3.2157	.033	Increase
11	3.3039	3.4608	.035	Increase
12	3.1863	3.5980	.007	Increase
13	3.4314	3.7157	.034	Increase
14	3.0588	3.3137	.033	Increase
15	3.2451	3.4216	.431	No significant change (15-84)
16	3.5686	3.5196	.769	
17	3.6471	3.7843	.354	
18	3.3431	3.2353	.499	
19	3.5882	3.3627	.359	
20	3.3137	3.0784	.087	
21	3.4608	3.5000	.751	
22	3.0490	3.1961	.253	
23	3.6275	3.4804	.450	
24	3.5980	3.4412	.210	
25	3.2255	3.3529	.450	
26	3.7843	3.5294	.255	
27	3.2255	3.1569	.681	
28	3.1275	2.9804	.163	
29	3.4412	3.3725	.698	
30	3.8529	3.7157	.207	
31	3.3235	3.2353	.472	
32	3.5784	3.4314	.177	
33	3.1863	3.4510	.053	
34	3.2627	3.3333	.769	
35	3.3039	3.1916	.438	
36	3.8333	3.5784	.256	
37	2.8922	3.0686	.188	
38	3.7745	4.0294	.231	
39	3.2451	3.3627	.259	
40	3.4804	3.6667	.330	
41	3.1569	3.1961	.755	

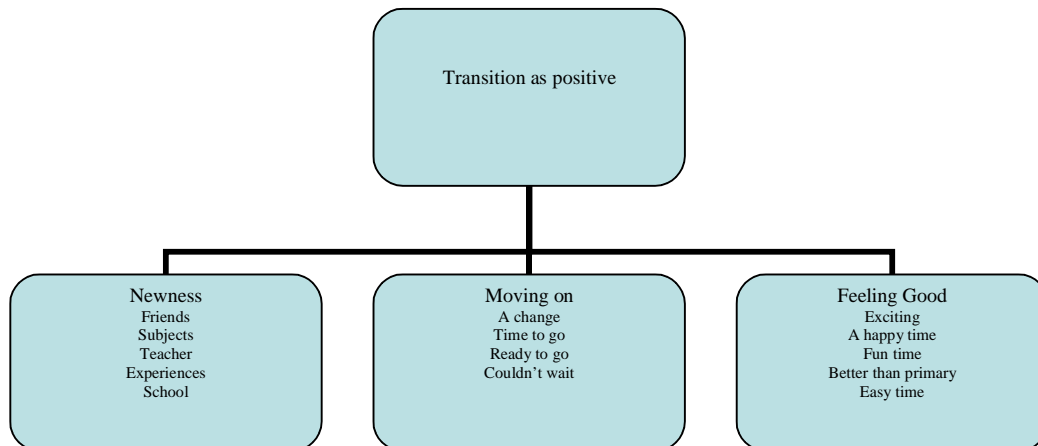
42	3.1569	3.3529	.056	
43	3.1765	3.3627	.228	
44	3.0784	3.2549	.220	
45	2.9902	3.0490	.607	
46	3.1961	3.0294	.141	
47	3.2255	3.3039	.444	
48	3.2255	3.3235	.495	
49	3.3414	3.4706	.788	
50	3.3824	3.4608	.486	
51	3.1961	3.1275	.676	
52	3.3431	3.3235	.901	
53	3.0196	2.7549	.070	
54	3.0490	3.1961	.253	
55	3.1471	3.2745	.328	
56	3.2451	3.4216	.431	
57	3.3627	3.3725	.908	
58	3.2451	3.1078	.358	
59	3.6569	3.3922	.148	
60	3.2255	3.2353	.939	
61	3.2941	3.2745	.892	
62	3.2451	3.4706	.260	
63	3.4216	3.2549	.489	
64	2.8529	3.0392	.069	
65	3.4020	3.2157	.293	
66	3.3922	3.1078	.134	
67	3.4412	3.3725	.698	
68	2.8725	2.7353	.239	
69	3.3627	3.1765	.181	
70	3.3235	3.3824	.646	
71	3.4412	3.4608	.914	
72	3.7843	3.5294	.255	
73	3.3824	3.4608	.486	
74	3.3039	3.1961	.438	
75	2.8922	3.0686	.188	
76	3.1275	2.9804	.163	
77	3.3627	3.3333	.769	
78	3.2255	3.1569	.681	
79	3.3235	3.3253	.472	
80	3.5784	3.4314	.177	
81	3.2255	3.3529	.450	
82	3.4412	3.4608	.914	
83	3.4314	3.4706	.788	
84	3.1863	3.4510	.053	

**Appendix 19 : Content Analysis of Transition Questionnaire Items**

**Appendix 19a : Transition as positive**

Positive 66
New friends 15
New subjects 4
New experience 3
A change 4
Different 2
Nothing 5
Better than primary 2
Fun 3
New teachers 5
Time to move on 3
New school 2
More people 2
More teachers 2
I couldn't wait to move 3
A happy time 2
Exciting time 2
Easy transition 1
Ready to move 4
Bigger 2

Newness 29	Friends 15 Subjects 4 Teachers 5 Experiences 3 School 2
Moving on 13	A change 4 Time to go 3 Ready to go 4 Couldn't wait 2
Positive experience of transition 10	Exciting 2 Happy time 2 Fun time 3 Better than primary 2 Easy 1
Nothing 5	

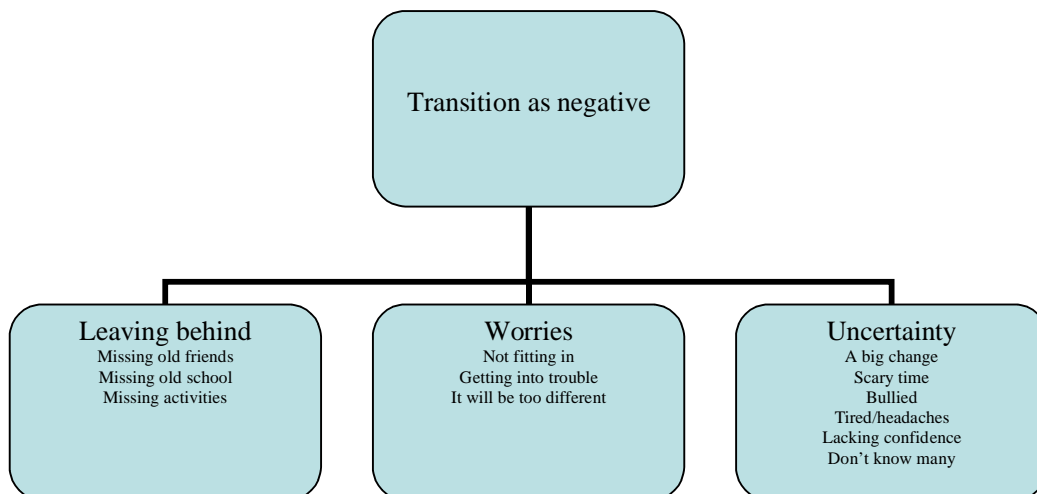


## Appendix 19b: Transition as Negative

Negative 29
Missed old school 5
Leaving old friends behind 3
Big change 2
Afraid-not fitting in 2
I lacked confidence 1
Didn't know many people 3
Scary time 1
Afraid –getting into trouble 2
Missed soccer 3
Different from primary 3
I was bullied 3
Tiring 1

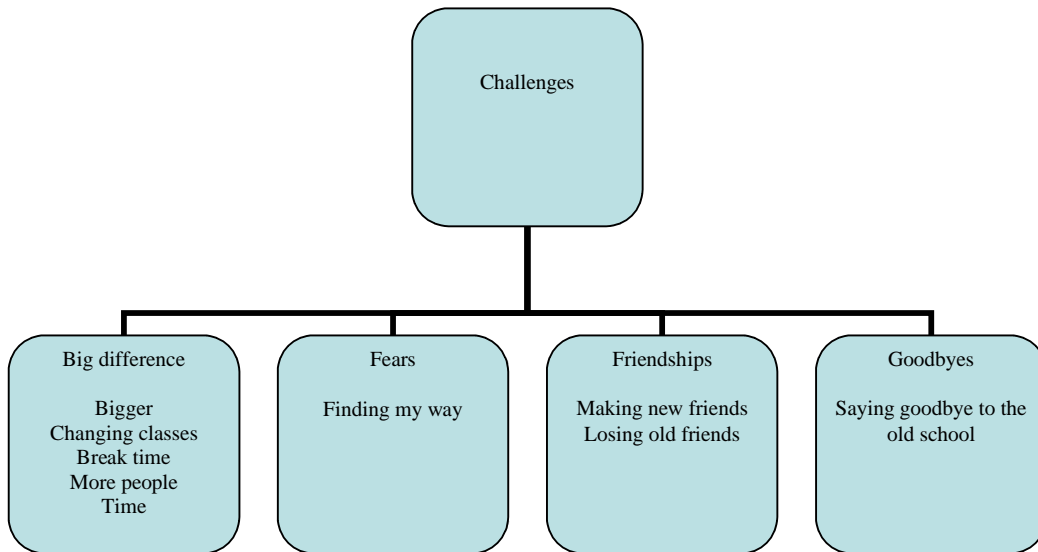
### Neg 1

Leaving behind 11	Missing old school 5 Missing old friends 3 Missing soccer 3
Worries 7	No fitting in 2 Getting into trouble 2 It will be different 3
Negative experience 11	A big change 2 Scary time 1 I was bullied 3 Tiring/headaches 1 Lacked confidence 1 Didn't know many people 3



**Appendix 19c: The hardest things about the transition for me**

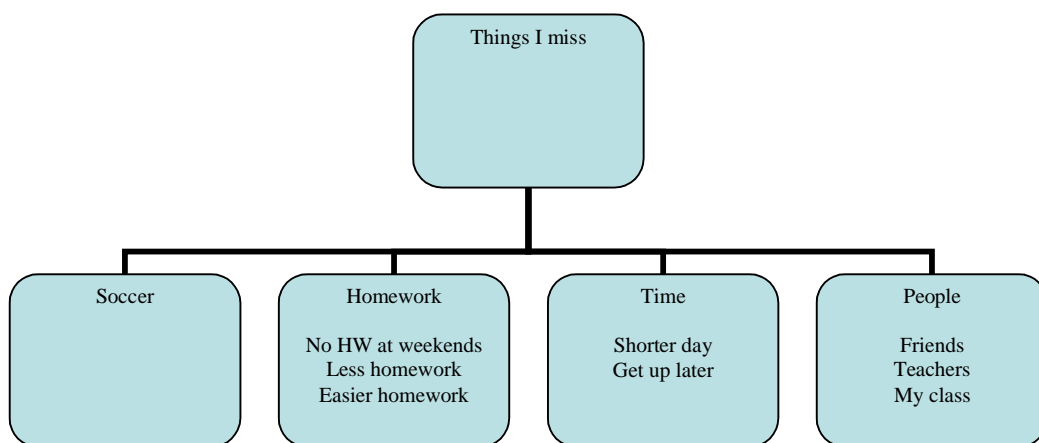
Difference (87) (between primary and secondary school)	More homework (14) Harder work (13) More subjects (9) New subjects (8) Changing classes (6) Boring break time now (5) Bigger school (5) More people (5) Time 22 up earlier longer day 15/7
Where to go? (21)	Knowing where to go (8) Remembering where to go (8) Finding my way around (5)
Friends (18)	Making new friends (11) Loosing old friends (7)
Leaving old school behind (10)	Say goodbye (10)



**Appendix 19d: Three things I really missed about primary school**

Teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	21
Lunch time	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	38
Hw. Weekend	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓												10
Only 1 teacher	✓	✓	✓																			
Friends	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	21
Eating lunch	✓																					1
Smaller class	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓																	5
Simplicity	✓																					1
Smaller place	✓																					1
Shorter day	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓																	26
Soccer	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											32
More days out	✓																					1
Less work	✓	✓	✓																			3
Less HW	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					17
Being the best	✓																					1
Easier HW	✓	✓	✓																			3
Getting up later	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓																	5
Staying 1 room	✓	✓																				2
Younger chn.	✓																					1
Nothing	✓	✓																				2
My class	✓	✓																				2
PE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓																	5
Easier work	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓																	5
More choice	✓																					1
Closer to home	✓																					1
No uniform	✓																					1
Friendlier	✓																					1
Fun	✓	✓																				2
Being oldest	✓	✓	✓	✓																		4
Heat	✓																					1
Free lunch	✓																					1

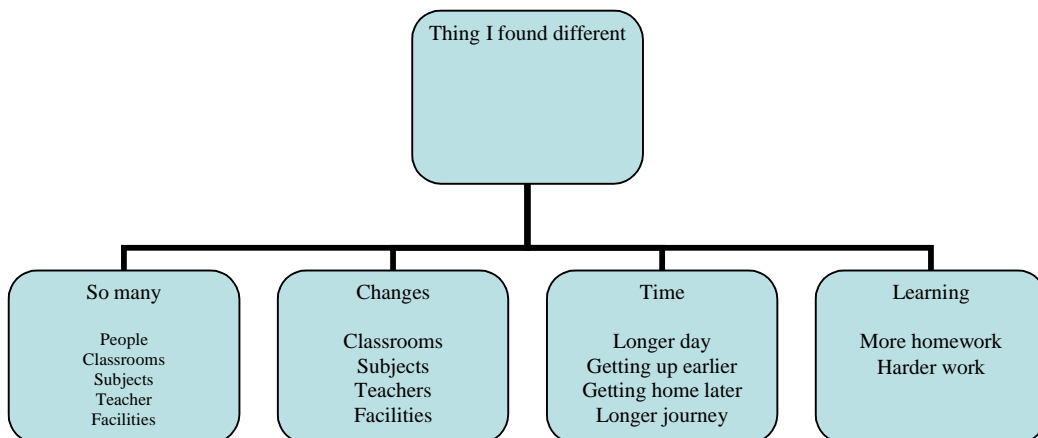
Soccer 32	Soccer 32
Homework 30	No HW at weekends (10) Less HW (17) Easier HW (3)
Time 31	Shorter day 26 Getting up later 5
People 44	Friends 21 Teacher 21 My class 2



**Appendix 19e: Three things I found different between primary and secondary school**

Changing classrooms 25	Stricter teachers 5
Changing teacher 3	Facilities 1
Canteen 9	Shorter breaks 2
We are the small ones 1	Room numbers 2
So many people 15	More breaks 4
Making new friends 12	Nothing 2
More home work 19	Getting up earlier 3
Bigger class sizes 4	More work 1
So many classrooms 10	Split from friends 1
Bigger 19	Longer breaks 2
Lockers 9	Earlier start 1
Harder work 13	More sport 1
Split classes 1	Being on time 1
Getting to know my way around 8	Miss friends 1
So many subjects 10	Rules 2
Longer day 30	Timetable 4
So many teachers 30	Smelly toilets 4
Later lunch 1	Dark when you leave home 1
No soccer at lunch 5	Uniform 3
Different friends 1	More friends 3
Heavier bag 1	Not being the best 1
Signings 1	Nothing to do at lunch 3
New subjects 2	More crowded 1
Clocking in 4	Longer journey 3
Different people 2	Not knowing anybody 1
Changing subjects 2	Shy around people I don't know 1

So many 65	People (15) Classrooms (10) Subjects (10) Teachers (30)
Changes 48	Changing classrooms (25) Changing subjects (3) Changing teachers (2) Facilities 18 (canteen 9 +lockers 9)
Longer day 30	Longer day (30)
Learning 32	More homework (19) Harder work (13)



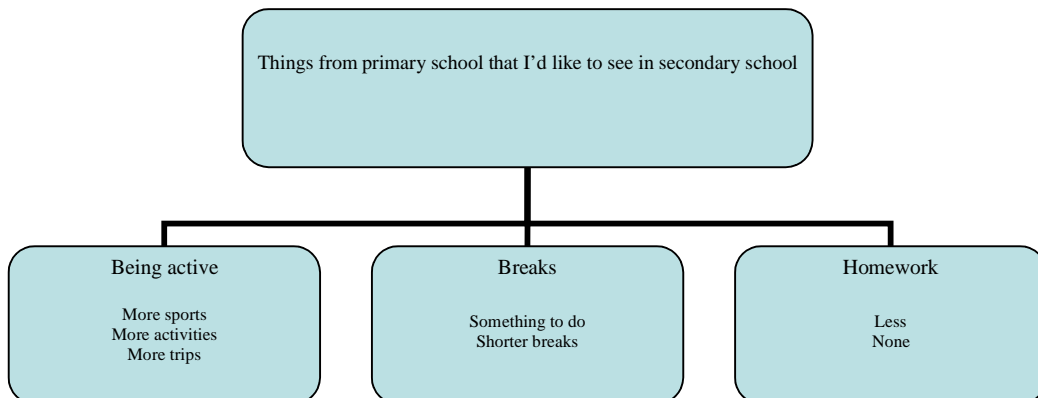


**Appendix 19f: Three things about primary school that I would like to see in secondary school**

Nothing 25	Study time 1
No uniform day 1	More trips 3
More outdoor sport 2	Cleaner toilets 1
No homework at weekend 6	No smoking in toilets 3
Less classes in a day 1	Friendlier place 1
More soccer 6	More relaxed 1
More basketball 4	Easier 1
No homework 1	Basketball courts 1
Nice teachers 1	Balls 1
More PE 10	Soccer pitch 2
Something to do at break 20	Know everyone 2
Shorter breaks 12	Slippers 1
Better seats 1	Relaxed 1
My old teachers 2	More football 2
Longer PE classes	
Less homework 20	
A lie-in in the morning 2	
start later 1	
Go home at 3 1	
More activities 5	



More activities 33	More soccer 6 More PE 10 More basketball 4 Balls 1 More trips 3 More activities 5 More football 2 More outdoor sport 2
Breaks 32	Something to do at breaks 20 Shorter breaks 12
Homework 27	Less 20 None at weekends 6 None 1



**Appendix 19g: Support I feel I would benefit from**

**Pre-transition support I'd like in primary school**

Nothing 44
More than 1 induction day 1
Introduction to subjects 2
<b>More Irish 5</b>
More English 2
More Maths 3
<b>Talk to us about the new school 5</b>
Tell us about the new subjects 2
<b>Teach us a language 10</b>
Show us what we will need 1
Show us pictures/video of new school 1
Give us more information 1
Show us examples of work 1
Speak to us about subject choices 1
Prepare us for a longer day 1
Talk to our parents 1
Have a day with all young people from schools together 5
<b>More and harder work 3</b>
Induction week instead of day 1
Get secondary school students to talk to us
Prepare us for how hard it is
Make us study more
Talk to us about getting involved with wrong group
<b>More science 4</b>
Push us harder
Introduce timetables
Introduce books

Nothing 44	Nothing 44
More	Than one induction day 2 More Irish 5 More English 2 More Maths 3 More Science 4 More and harder work 3 More study 2 More languages 10 Push us harder 2
Information	Talk to us 5 Tell us Teach us Show us Give us Prepare us Introduce to us Get others to talk to us

**Pre-transition support I'd like from the secondary school**

Nothing 46
Told us what to bring the first day
Prepared us for how hard it is 2
Longer induction period 4
<b>Given us more information 10</b>
Tell us more about the new school
Tell us more about the new subjects 3
<b>Show us all the rooms 4</b>
<b>Bring out a speaker to us 9</b>
<b>Give us an information leaflet 5</b>
More time making subject choices 3
Come and listen to our questions 2
<b>More than one tour of the school 9</b>
Showed us how timetables work
Day with all new students before summer
A map of the school
A talk 3
Showed us how to clock in properly 3

1

Nothing 46	Nothing 46
More	Induction time Than one visit to school Time choosing subjects Information
Prepare us	Told us Prepared us Given us Show us Bring to us Give us I Listen to us Facilitate us Talk to us

**Immediate post- transition support I'd like in secondary school**

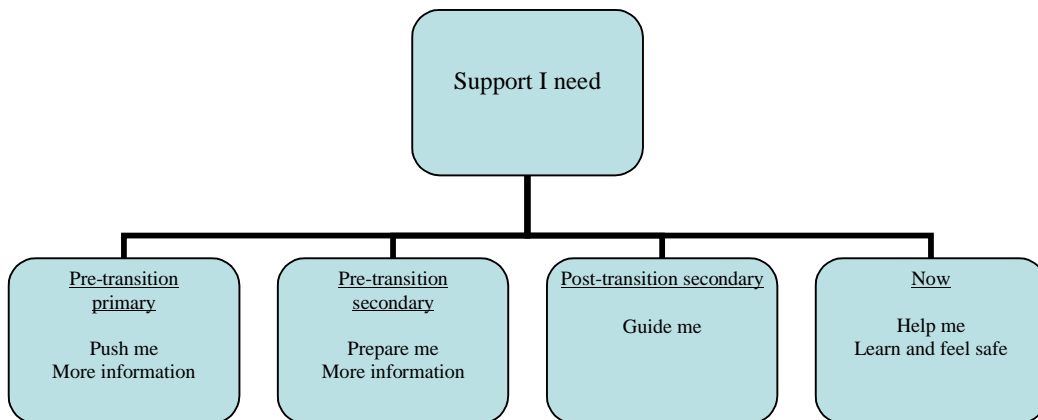
Nothing 50
No homework
Same classroom
Shown us around at start
Clocking in
No homework for first week
Less homework 2
Shorter time
<b>Help picking subjects 5</b>
Explain daily routine
<b>Put you in class with old school friends 5</b>
Only first years in school for a week
Try all subjects before finally choosing
Make sure we are getting on OK 3
<b>Older students to show us around 4</b>
<b>Try all subjects in First Year 4</b>
Give us names of teachers and subjects they teach
<b>Help us get to know where rooms are 4</b>
Don't be so hard on us

Nothing 50	Nothing 50
Familiarise us	Show us around 4 With clocking in Explain daily routine With all subjects With teachers and their subjects Where the rooms are
Learning	Homework Help us pick subjects
Care for us	Make sure we are getting on ok Don't be so hard on us Keep us with our old friends.

Support I'd like now in secondary school

Nothing 70
<b>Less homework 5</b>
<b>Study groups 6</b>
Make it more interesting 1
Better seats 1
<b>Bullying committee 4</b>
<b>Set up student council 3</b>
Extra locker key 1
Study class 1
<b>Take bullying more seriously 4</b>
Confidentiality around bullying 1

Nothing 70	Nothing 70
Bullying	Bullying committee Take bullying more seriously Confidentiality around bullying
Learning	Less homework Study groups Study class



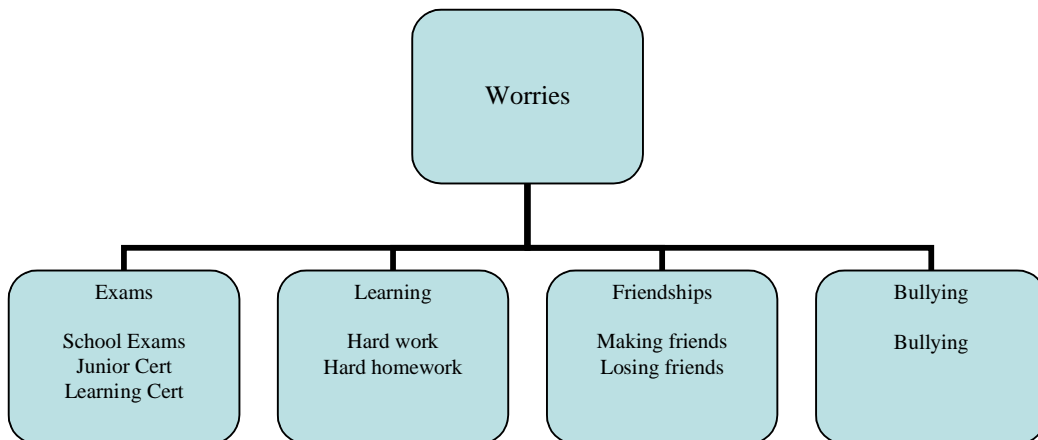
## Appendix 19h: Worries I have now in secondary school

Bullying 10
Smoking 1
Drinking 1
Nothing 35
Moody teachers 1
Junior Certificate 22
Making friends 5
Becoming an adult 1
Loosing friends 5
Hard work 5
Getting slips 1
All the homework 5
All the new people 1
Getting into trouble 4
Education cuts 1
My appearance 1

↓

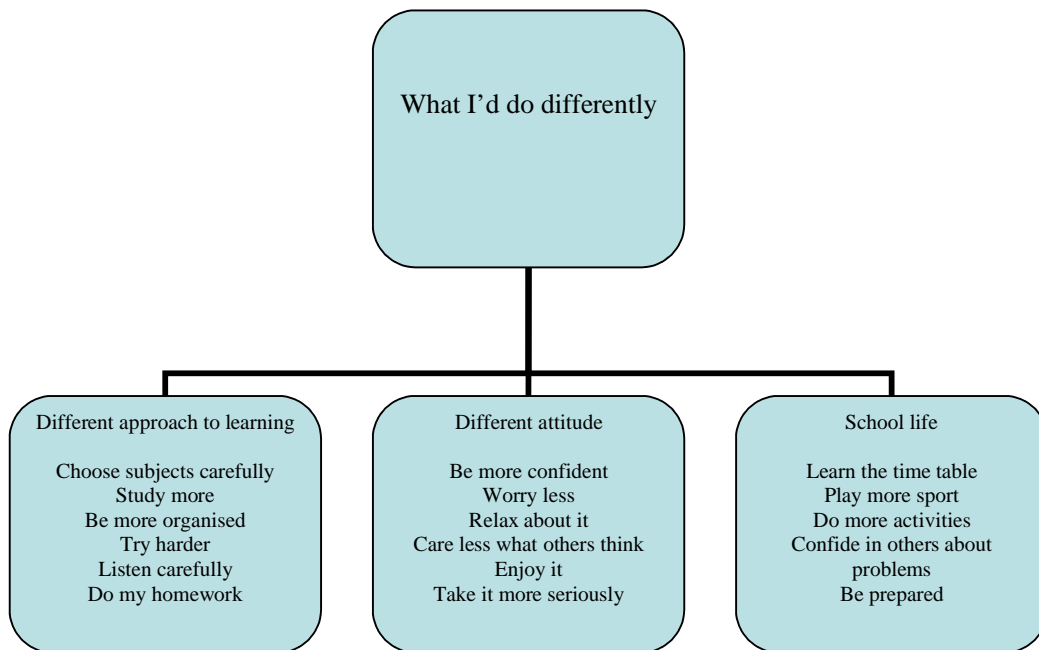
Nothing 35	Nothing 35
Exams 22	School exams 3 Junior certificate 15 Leaving Certificate 4
Learning 10	Hard work 5 Hard homework 5
Friendships 10	Making friends 5 Loosing friends 5
Bullying 10	Bullying 10

↓



**Appendix 19i: If you were doing it again, what would you do differently?**

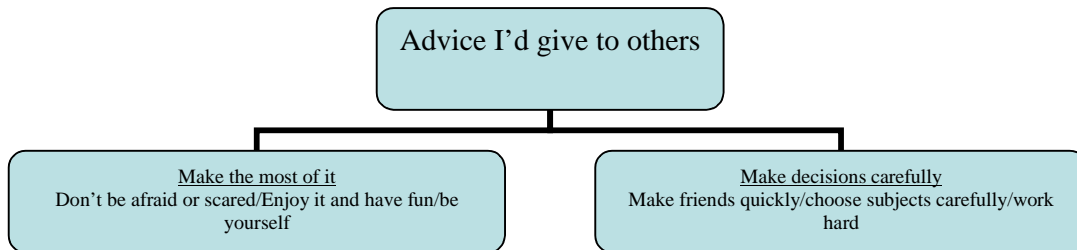
Nothing	49
Approach to learning (40)	Choose subjects more carefully (8) Study more (8) Be more organised (4) Try harder (9) Listen carefully (10) Do my homework (1)
Attitude (18)	Be more confident (6) Worry less (9) Relax more (1) Enjoy it (1) Take it more seriously (1)
School life (21)	Learn the timetable (4) Play more sport (5) Do more activities (5) Confide in another around bullying (3) Care less what others think (3) Be prepared (1)



## Appendix 19j: The advice I would give to others

Bring ball to school for breaks 1
Don't be scared 3
Try to make new friends 10
Don't get into trouble 4
Be prepared for the change 2
Don't be worries 32
Be yourself 9
Enjoy it 10
Have fun 3
Be ready for the study 3
Take advice 1
Don't panic 2
Ask for help when you need it 5
Choose subjects carefully 9
Do your best 3
Enjoy the primary school 5
None 5
Work hard 9
Get sleep 1
Don't draw attention to yourself 1
Don't be the class clown 1
Take your time to settle 1
Do your homework 1
Enjoy the canteen 1

Don't be worried or scared (35)
Enjoy it and have fun (13)
Try to make friends quickly (10)
Choose subjects carefully (9)
Work hard (9)
Be yourself (9)

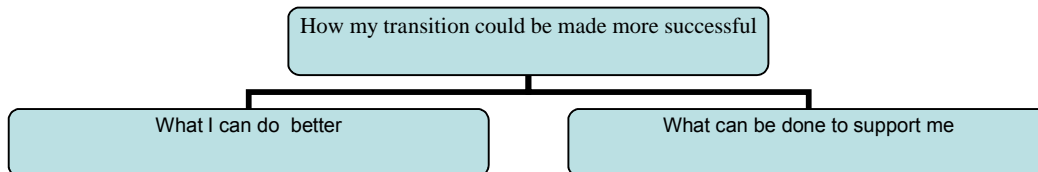




### Appendix 19k: How my rating could be improved

Try harder 8
Nothing 45
Provide more information 1
Look at homework 5
If it wasn't so stressful
By not stressing/worrying so much 4
If I'd realised how serious it was 1
Nicer teachers
If I was brighter
More PE 2
More activities 3
Easier subjects
Knowing what to do on the first day
More to do at break times 3
More induction time 3
Making friends easier 5
Better breaks 2
Shorter day 2
No bullying 3
I'd picked better subjects 3
If I was prepared more

Nothing 45	Nothing 45
Me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I tried harder</li> <li>Me not being stressed/worried</li> <li>Me realising...</li> <li>I was brighter</li> <li>Choosing my subjects carefully</li> </ul>
Them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Give me more information</li> <li>Look at homework</li> <li>Look at breaks</li> <li>Provide more activities</li> <li>Look at bullying</li> <li>More induction</li> </ul>



## Appendix 20 : Development of Themes- Decline in Self-esteem Data

First Order Coding (36)	Second Order Coding (7)	Third Order Coding (2)		
Big change (good)	Change			
Smaller Classes in primary (bad)				
A Change (good)				
Big change (good)				
Change in support (bad)				
More teachers now (bad)				
New friends (good)				
More friends (good)				
Harder to find my way (bad)				
Longer day	Time	<u>Transition is a time of great change</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change</li> <li>• Learning</li> <li>• Routine (routine + time)</li> </ul>		
Waking... getting up earlier				
Up early...back late				
More and longer classes	Routine		<u>Transition is a very threatening time</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal threats (thoughts + feelings)</li> <li>• External threats (change bad)</li> </ul>	
Change in my routine				
Worried... friends	Feelings			
scared				
Worries				
Didn't want to come				
Nervous ...exams				
It is fine	Thoughts			
would do it again				
Don't be worried				
was more popular	Threats			
Self conscious				
Don't be scared				
scared				
still adjusting				
knew more in primary				
tired				
Judging				
Not as well known now				
All new subjects	Learning			
Harder work				
All new work				
More homework				
Lots of work				

## Appendix 21: Development of Themes-Increase in Self-esteem Data

First Order Coding (43)	Second Order Coding (6)	Third Order Coding (4)
made new friends	Friends	
friends as great		
Old friends		
Made lots more friends		
Friends helped		
not lonely - friends		
new and more friends		
happy friends		
knew people coming in		
Friends kept me sane		
positive experience	Positive	<p><u>My friends helped me along the way</u></p> <p><u>I liked the changes along the way</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• positive personal changes</li> <li>• positive difference between schools</li> </ul> <p><u>It was a positive journey for me</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a positive time</li> <li>• reality was different</li> </ul> <p><u>Though I enjoyed it I faced challenges</u></p>
liked the change		
good experience		
big change ... good		
All fine		
great		
Fine		
Happy		
pleased		
Different to what thought before	Not what expected	
myths		
Horror story		
Don't worry		
Not what expected		
Picture different		
Missed primary	challenges	
Gradually got into it		
Got better		
Getting up earlier		
Longer day		
scared		
nervous		
Hard work		
Hard subjects		
Growing	Positive Personal change	
Feeling free		
Confidence building		
Positive differences	Positive differences between schools	
Like differences		
Like new teachers		
New subjects		
Exciting subjects		
More people		
More subjects		

## Appendix 22: Development of Themes-Primary Teacher Interview Data.

Teacher 1	T2	T3	T4
Support (wedo)	Massive change (ch)	Working well (do)	Cope well (g)
Fight for themselves (chyp)	Personalised system (ch)	Ready to go (gr)	Challenges (chyp)
Not known in sec school (chyp)	Right time (gr)	Growth (gr)	Relationships (chyp)
We know them (wedo)	Miss them (go)	Challenges (chyp/cht)	Bond (go)
Sec school not same (chyp)	Know them (ch)	Love change (g)	More opportunities (ch)
More opportunities (ch)	New start (g)	Happy to move (g)	Family /context (g)
Challenges yp (chyp)	Child in context (do)	Babied (do)	Friends (chyp)
Feedback (ss)	Challenges (ch)	Independence (ch)	Pre-conceptions (chyp)
Label chyp/cht	Growth/moving on (gr)	Bit much made of process (g)	Clean slate (go)
Worry (go)	Empowering (gr)	Role of sec school (ss)	Growth (gr)
Ss could ask us (ss)	Mammy (ss)	Need more info (ss)	Ready to go (gr)
Working together (could)	Little less caring (ch)	Parents (g)	Liaise with sec school (could)
Support we give (do)	Major change (ch)	Importance of questions (g)	New start (go)
Ready (gr)	Lack of pickup (could)	Continuity (ss)	Need to know more about new school (ss/could)
Interventions (do)	Lapse in support (could)	Feedback (ss)	Follow on support (ss)
Choice (gr/ch)	More communication/feedback (ss)		Feedback (ss)
Clean slate (g)	Working well (do)		Specific interventions (g)
Spoon fed (do)	Parents (could)		Worries (go)
Friends (chyp)	Specific interventions (do)		More communication (could/ss)
Good job (do)	Time pressure (cht0)		Child in context (g)
Security (do)	Middle person (ep)		Social skills (chyp)
Need to be looked after (cht)	More info (ss0)		Working well (g)
Monitor child (ep)	Sec school expectations (ss)		EP being there (ep)
T5	T6	T7	T8
Cope well (g)	Excited (g)	Positive /cope well (g)	Power of questions (g)
Parents (g)	Ready to do (gr)	No feedback (ss)	Eager to go (g)
No feedback (ss)	Feedback...lack of (ss/cht)	Growth moving on (gr)	Parents (g)
Positive time (g)	Huge change (ch)	Molly coddle (do)	Small prim school (ch)
Know them (do)	Protected/spoon-fed v. independent (ch)	Cocoon (ch)	Don't want to stand out (chyp)
Ready + natural progression (gr)	Challenges (ch)	Nervous excited (g)	Comfort zone (ch/chyp)
Challenges (chyp/cht)	Comfort in p. school (ch)	Label (cht/chyp)	Have to go through it (go)
Security...big fish (chyp)	Baby them (do)	Fresh start (lg)	Holistic view of child (do)
Friends (chyp)	Picking subjects (chyp)	Know kids (lg)	Well being-focus(do)
Just life...growing up/mature (gr)	Looking forward (g)	Worry ...wonder (cht/go)	Lack of support in SS (ch)
Need communication (ss)	Transition specific supports (g)	Spoon feed (do)	Growth (gr)
Left wondering (ss/cht)	Good process (g)	YP questions (chyp)	Sec school great (g)
Worry (go)	Need to get and give information (SS)	Creative thinkers (ch)	
Specific interventions (g)	Questions I have (SS/CHT)	Organise themselves (chyp)	Need more time (cht)
No continuity (could/ss)	Questions yp have (SS/CHT/CHYP)	Do too much (do)	Transition specific interventions (g)
Paddle own canoe (chyp)	Supports (g)	Just expect it will happen (g)	Coping skills (chyp)
Entrance and exit (g)	Like to know (ss)	Foot in each calm...pass on info (ep)	Explore what YP are thinking (ep)
Want to know how they are getting on (ss)	Social skills (chyp)	Feedback (ep)	No formal approach (could)
	Advice /being available (ep)	Being there (ep)	Just happens (g)
	INSET (ep)		Questionnaire could be useful (could)

Second Order Codes	Code
1. General	g
2. Change	ch
3. Transition as growth	gr
4. Transition as letting go	go
5. Challenge for young people	chyp
6. Challenge for teachers	cht
7. What we do well	wedo
8. What we could do better	could
9. What secondary school could do	SS
10. The EP	EP

### **Third Order Coding**

#### Transition is a time of moving on and letting go

- Young people have to move on
- We have to let them go

#### Transition can be a challenging time

- It can be a challenging time for young people
- It can be a challenging time for teachers too

#### Supporting people around transition is important

- What we do well
- What we could do better
- How the secondary school can help
- The role of the EP

## Appendix 23 : Development of Themes - Secondary School Focus Group

### Data

First Order Coding (44)	Second Order Coding (8)	Third Order Coding (3)
Cope well with change	Transition general	
Like it...change		
Strength in family		
Like new aspects = change		
enjoyment		
Parents scared		
Look forward to change		
Positive changes		
Some don't make it		
Social side	Challenges/young people	<u>Transition is a time of growth and change</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• transition general</li> <li>• growth</li> </ul>
Making friends		
isolation		
Used to decisions being made		
New relationships		
More self organisation		
No enough information		
We all have different approaches		
Choosing subjects		
Learning difficulties	Challenges for teachers	<u>Transition can be a challenging can be a challenging time</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• young people</li> <li>• teachers too</li> </ul>
No organisational skills		
They know them so well		
More resources		
Babies		
They are growing	Growth	<u>Supporting people around transition is important</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What we do well</li> <li>• What we could do better</li> <li>• What primary school could do</li> <li>• The role of the EP</li> </ul>
More grown up		
Moving on		
Lots of new things to experience		
Offer support	What we do well	
Talk to them		
Keep an eye on them		
Watch them		
Help them		
Are prepared		
Get more information	Could co better	
Liaise with primary		
Issues more invitations/teachers		
Not leave support lapse		
Teach organisational skills	Primary school could	
Give more information		
Contact us		
Understanding	Role of EP	
Expertise		
Drop outs		
Being there		

## **Appendix 24: Example of Transition Support Plan**

Examples of specific supports and interventions that may be stated in a transition policy and fruitfully used in supporting young people and schools around transition. These are examples as arising in this research. The template is not exhaustive or prescriptive but a possible guide to supporting transition.

### **Situation**

All aspects of the transition process will be outlined in a comprehensive transition policy which outlines timescales, templates for recording and sharing information, agreed protocols for communication, names of relevant school personnel/coordinators, learning targets to be achieved on both systems, etc.

- Sixth Class primary school assessment of young each young person in a holistic sense...strengths, Individual Education Plans, areas of need etc. A thorough picture is built up of the young person. Information is passed on based on an understanding of what is relevant and why. The Transition Profile template may prove useful here.
- Sharing of all relevant information with relevant secondary school personnel. Agreed information recording templates available.
- Primary school teachers are aware of secondary school system and what the young person needs to be successful there.
- Feedback from new school facilitated.

### **Self**

Young Person

- Teaching and learning that equips the young person with personal skills regarded as important to meet the challenges of transition.....social skills, coping skills, decision making skills, interpersonal skills, personal development work, help seeking skills.
- Exploring the anticipated transition with young people in a way that gives them the learning skills and confidence to meet the challenges they will face along the way....study skills, management of learning skills, meta-cognitive skills, and organisational skills.

Self: Teachers

- All teachers have a knowledge and awareness the agrees practice protocols in relation to sharing information, liaising with colleagues, requesting information, teaching and learning for transition, etc.
- Teachers are comfortable in the fact that their needs will be met by others in a respectful manner. Any discomfort around the process can be relayed to the link person in school and brought to an appropriate forum for clarification and exploration.

## **Supports**

### The young people

- A formal approach to teaching and learning for transition based on a transition curriculum that is negotiated amongst schools and between school systems.
- Opportunities for addressing various aspects of the transition based on a needs analysis of what the young people are saying. Their voice is important and needs to be accessed and heard. A questionnaire may prove useful here.
- Teaching and learning opportunities that enable young people to put the theories they are learning into practice in the real setting. Transfer and generalisation of learning around transition facilitated in the real life setting of the secondary school.
- Specific programmes/interventions related to transition.
- Young people with more complex needs have an individualised Transition Plan Support Plan.

### For Teachers

- Opportunities to liaise with teachers in the other system...clear guidelines around most appropriate and effective means of communication.
- Access to all relevant protocols relating to the transition process...transition policy available.
- Access to resources to facilitate further learning in relation to transition.

## **Strategies**

### For young People

- Opportunities for young people to have their questions answered by teachers and young people who have gone through the experience...past pupil visiting the primary school, question and answer sessions, a worry box.
- Opportunities for young people to access to general information...pamphlets, information booklets, maps, video, Information technology.
- Opportunities for young people to apply learning to the real setting and create a positive picture of what they are facing...school visits, pre-transition secondary school based activities, pre-transition subject sampling in the primary and secondary school setting.

### For teachers

- Collaborative teaching opportunities
- Teacher exchanges
- Formal meetings
- Informal dialogue and discussion...phone calls.
- School visits.
- Access to information through a variety of media...pamphlets, information booklets, information seminars, and video.
- A link person or transition coordinator who can be contacted in the other school setting.
- Access to appropriate resources to continue up-skilling and learning.
- Support from other people...parents, educational psychologist.



Appendix 25: Transition Profile Template

# Transition Profile

From

Primary

To

Secondary School

The information within relates to a young person and therefore should be treated with respect. This information is being transferred to the secondary school having been discussed with the parent(s)/guardian(s) and with their full knowledge and consent

- Small print denotes possible examples. Other details may be included.

**Personal Details**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address:

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Telephone Number:

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Names of Primary Care Giver(s)

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**Primary School Details**

Name of School:

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Principal:

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School Telephone Number:

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**Previous Assessment Details**

Has this young person been assessed? Y\_\_\_ / N\_\_\_

Most recent assessment date? \_\_\_\_\_

Are reports available? \_\_\_\_\_

Are these reports released with parental consent? Y\_\_\_ / N\_\_\_

Assessment details (with parental consent):

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Has this young person been receiving support from other agencies?  
(Speech and language, Child Guidance, Occupational therapy, Social Work, Medical care, Counselling, etc.)

Details available:

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**Health status**

Serious illness, medical conditions, sensory difficulties-hearing/vision, medical needs, mediation issues/routines, toileting, etc.

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**Difficulties experienced by this young person** - as identified and experienced in the primary school setting: (Academic/Social/Emotional/Behavioural/Physical/Other)

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**Effective supports received in:**

**Classroom setting:**

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**School setting:**

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From the **DES:**

(Resource teaching/Learning Support/Exemption from Irish/Special Needs Assistance, Assistive Technology, etc)

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**Home setting:**

Based on consultation with parent(s)/Guardian(s)

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Areas of strength include:

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Areas of need:

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**Greatest concerns for this young person as they make the transition from primary school?**

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**Based on our experience, we feel that this young person will benefit from the following supports:**

(Mentoring, subject choices, etc.)

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**Academic Profile:**

(Based on teacher observations, school-based assessment, teacher reports, pupil reports, parent reports, etc.)

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**Details of standardised tests administered in past two years:**

Date	Name	Result

**Please give details of skills in the following curricular areas:****Literacy**

Reading	
Writing	
Spelling	
Comprehension	

<p><b>Life Skills</b></p> <p>(Form filling, social sight vocab, personal writing, functional writing, media awareness, technology, reading for pleasure, conversation skills, etc.)</p>	
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**Numeracy**

<p>Number work</p>	
<p>Life Skills (Time, money, measurement, language of maths, etc.)</p>	

<p><b>Language</b></p>	
<p>Expressive Language</p>	
<p>Receptive Language</p>	
<p><b>Other</b></p>	

**Relevant information pertaining to life skills:**

(Self-care, relationships, emotional intelligence, at risk/antisocial behaviour, self expression, awareness of needs, ability to explore issues with others, etc)

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**Personal interests, Hobbies** (which can be capitalised upon and incorporated into effective and meaningful teaching strategies, learning experiences, etc.)

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**Please comment on student's non-intellective skills, which help one to learn more effectively:**

Attention	
Concentration	
Listening	
Organisation	
Relationships with others/social skills	
Motivation	
Acceptance/awareness of boundaries/rules	
Self -Esteem	
Ability to work independently	

Homework	
Motor Skills	
Transition time behaviour	
Playground behaviour	
Attitude to authority	
Response to praise/encouragement	
<b>Additional information that we feel has not been addressed:</b>	
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<p>Signed:</p> <p>Parent(s):</p> <hr/> <p>Principal:</p> <hr/> <p>Teacher(s)</p> <hr/>
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Additional information may be attached with parental knowledge and consent



