

Pupils' and teaching staff's lived experience of a Year 7 transition intervention in South East England: A phenomenographic study

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Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
Doctorate of Philosophy

2019

Declaration

'I, Paulet Brown confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.'

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Abstract

Pupils' transition from primary to secondary school has been debated for several decades and has been identified as a crucial time in pupils' lives. Evaluation of transition concluded that on average, 40% of pupils find this move problematic, which results in a hiatus in their progress both academically and socially. Studies on transition to secondary school have notably focussed on the process and procedures, and data derived from the stakeholders were devoid of the voices of pupils and teachers who were active participants in the process of transition.

This thesis reports on the lived experiences of the participants and the pupils' and teaching staff's perceptions before and after engaging with 'Year 7 Project' intervention. The project is based in a secondary school, Erin Sinclair Secondary School (pseudonym), located in an urban area of South East England, the aim of which was to ease the transition to secondary school of at-risk pupils by providing additional support during the transition process. In order to understand the transition process, the study investigated the change in perceptions during the transition year through the experiences of pupils and teaching staff as they move into, move through and move out of the transition process.

Drawing on phenomenography, 50 participants were interviewed, comprising of sixteen teaching staff, the head teacher, the deputy head teacher, and thirty-two pupils. Half of the teaching staff were class teachers who were divided into a project group and a comparison group while the others supported pupils who were unable to access the Key Stage 3 National Curriculum (mostly in the project group of classes).

The findings indicated that the 'Year 7 Project' intervention had a positive impact on pupils in the project group; they experienced fewer anxieties and settled more quickly into secondary school. Data analysis revealed preparation and support as fundamental to ensuring transition success as outlined by Nancy Schlossberg's, transition theory.

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In loving memory of my mother

Mrs Ethelyn Brown

Acknowledgements

This thesis required of me much more than any linear completion of pre-determined tasks. As a consequence of meandering at times on some directed and undirected pathways, I am, in many ways, no longer the person who set out on this journey. I have several people to thank who have contributed in various ways because of their support and co-operation.

I would like to thank my mother whose last request of me was to accept the challenge of reading for a Ph.D. Mommy, you have issued the challenge and under duress I have accepted and completed the task. Thank you for giving me the tools needed over the years and teaching me how overcome obstacles and show strength even when I am weak and tired or wanted to quit. I also would like to thank my father for financing my studies especially in the early days as an international student.

To my dear husband Tony, thanks for sacrificing our time together and for making the completion of my Ph.D. a priority above everything else. Your love throughout was amazing and I am so lucky to have met you. You have been my rock and the support offered is measureless.

I am grateful to my supervisors, Dr Christine Callender and Dr Jane Hurry, for their advice and encouragement.

There are two persons in particular who have made a substantial contribution to my well-being during the course of the study. To Maria Bakaroudis and Judy Hemingway, you have sustained me through my ups and downs with food, coffee, tea, walks and lots of encouragement and I am most grateful. To Maria, you have listened and understood me and have helped me put so many things into perspective. Thanks for being such a good friend and confidante. To Judy, you are a friend like no other. Your words are few yet most profound. Thanks for introducing the word "stickability", which I have held on to from the first time we met and especially during the final stages of writing up.

There are so many others who have offered support especially through words of encouragement and wisdom. Special mention goes to Gertrude Shotte, Toulia Korilaki, Carolyn Silberfeld and many of my friends and colleagues I have met over the years.

Last, but by no means least, I must acknowledge the Institute of Education and organisers of "The Year 7 Project" who provided me with access to the school involved in this research and also encouraged pupils and teaching staff to take part. I would like to express my appreciation for their initial and ongoing support. I am indebted to the many school staff who tolerated disruption to their teaching schedule with equanimity, and provided practical help by organising pupils for the purpose of collecting data.

Above all, I must thank all the pupils and teaching staff in the study for discussing their views openly and for stalwartly agreeing to take part in the interviews and responding honestly and conscientiously. I am most grateful.

Chapter One – Introduction

1.1 Chapter overview

The transition from primary to secondary school has been prominent in the fields of education management and research for almost five decades (Nisbet 1969; Youngman 1977; Blyth 1983; Alspaugh 1998; Akos 2006), with this move from primary to secondary school regarded as one of the most difficult transitions in pupils' educational careers (Zeedyk 2003). This research was conceived and conducted in order to explore the lived reality of the primary to secondary school transition process, for pupils and teaching staff, in an initiative called the Year 7 Project (Y7P). It follows a phenomenographic approach, which focuses on pupils' and teaching staff's perceptions of the transition to one secondary school in South East England, known by the pseudonym of Erin Sinclair Secondary School (ESSS). It addresses a topical issue and explores ways to ease the transition from primary to secondary school with the specific intention of highlighting those areas that support and prepare pupils. While the Y7P targeted incoming pupils who were failing to meet nationally expected standards in literacy, this study reports on one particular aspect, namely, the transition process that occurs during the first year of secondary school.

This research attempts to further develop the understanding of transition, which has been noted as the most important move in pupils' academic careers, impacting on their learning and achievement at the secondary-school level (Spelman 1979). Rather than evaluating the project and scrutinising whether it benefitted the pupils concerned, the study focused on the perspectives of the participants who were living the said experience and were able to provide current and prompt reflections on their experiences through a phenomenographic lens. The phenomenographic design has been identified as a qualitative study approach that addresses variations in

phenomena; in this case, it focuses on how students understand these variations and relate with them (Tight 2016). The rationale for conducting this kind of a research by adopting the phenomenographic perspective is highlighted in the methodology chapter.

This study aims to add to the current body of research in the area of transition to secondary school by examining the perspectives of participants engaging in an intervention in order to gain insight into what occurred during the transition. It will also examine how and why participants' perspectives change over the year. The data collected will be discussed alongside the literature presented in the literature review, Chapters 2 and 3.

1.2 The Motivation for the Study

From the onset of this study, it is important to note that I was not responsible for the Year 7 Project's design, but, in my role as a researcher, was invited to choose one aspect of the project that would be of interest for my doctoral studies. In this regard, the study presented in this thesis focuses on the pupils' and teaching staff's perceptions of the transition process while engaging in the Year 7 Project.

In discussing my role and position in the Year 7 Project, I have opted to present this section and the following ones in the first person in order to engage reflective practices and to solidify my identity as a researcher. Throughout the research process, I aligned my reflections with those of Gibbs (1988) and Bhaskar(1989)from the perspective that many persons learn best from their own experiences. Therefore, employing the Gibbs reflective writing model inspired me to systematically think through my experiences in school and configure my thoughts throughout the study. Bhaskar's (1989) pattern

about the way's reality affects human thoughts and comprehension were also prominent for the study.

It is my intention to instil in the reader a sense of my realisations concerning my position and, consequently, a level of my accountability, which must have interacted with the perspectives of those participating in the research. In addition, I found that reflecting on the more challenging aspect of the transition experience sparked my interest from a personal point of view. Because of this opportunity and my reflective nature, it was decided that I would examine the role of Year 7 Project's intervention pertaining to pupils' learning and settling into secondary school.

My interest in the transition from primary to secondary school was inspired by my own experiences as a pupil making the same transition in the Commonwealth of the Bahamas. The difficult transition process hindered my progress academically and socially during the first year of secondary school. My grades dropped significantly, and I had no friends at my new school. I moved from an intimate school of 300 pupils, where I was popular with both teachers and peers, to a secondary school with 1,600 pupils, where I knew only my sister. I felt lost for most of my first year and forming friendships was difficult. The secondary school had no measures in place to support pupils like myself, who were unsettled by the transition. No one appeared to notice that my grades dropped significantly.

My academic interest in the primary-to-secondary-school transfer and transition process was further motivated when learning of the experiences of my family members, friends and colleagues. They offered different experiences, with the majority admitting that moving to secondary school was indeed a challenge and that some pupils need support in adjusting to the new environment. Based on my experience and interest in transition to secondary school, the study has thus

attempted to demonstrate how variations in perceptions occur within the transition to secondary school and how they can support pupils, once they are identified, during the learning process. The research was also undertaken with a view to exploring the many issues around transition that I observed during my personal educational journey. My view of the transition process and the experiences of the pupils and teaching staff in the Year 7 Project intervention informed my decision to adopt a phenomenographic and predominantly qualitative approach to gathering the research data. I believed that this approach would provide the answers to my research questions, which focus on perceptions of engagement of the Year 7 Project intervention during the first year of secondary school, while bridging the transition gap. An important element of the research design that underpins this study is that it focuses on variations and, in this case, on the pupils' and teaching staff's experiences with and reactions to the different interactions within the project.

1.3 Why Transition to Secondary School Is Important

The transition to secondary school has been identified as one of the most critical stages in pupils' academic journey. Pupils' experiences of the transition process can influence academic and social development which has the proclivity to unearth other difficulties which can contribute to unsuccessful transitions. The transition to secondary school has attracted research both nationally and internationally with a focus on social adjustment and changes to the learning environment resulting in discontinuity in learning and social groups (Hargreaves and Galton, 2002) and Gutman and Midgley 2000).

Discontinuity in organisational and social domains is one of the main factors that affects adolescents' experiencing school transition (Anderson 2004). This discontinuity is also prevalent in the school curriculum, which Hayes and Vivian (2007)

refer to as *fragmented*. Continuity in education is vital to adolescent development, to building their character and to developing life skills (Arthur 2010). In addition, Hayes and Vivian (2007) noted that continuity is important for true adjustment to any new environment, not solely for conformity to secondary school. In exploring the need for continuity in the new learning environment, the difference between primary and secondary school is significant; thus, pupils must adjust if they are to make a successful transition to secondary school. Certain variations make this transition different among students, such as the level of intellectualism that affects the transition frequency of students, as not all of them will be curious and motivated to learn in new environments that are full of diverse challenges. Social, physical, emotional and moral aspects also play a significant role in the transition process (Ferguson 1998). While the transition from primary to secondary school is expected and outside their control, children must organise and negotiate the exchange of the secure primary-school environment, with its familiar surroundings, routines and rules, for the new environment's rules, values and structure (Arthur 2010).

The move to secondary school, as a number of authors suggest, is a critical time in the life of adolescents, a time when they can experience both negative and positive changes (Sirsch 2003; Rice 2011; Serbin 2013). Indeed, the transition to secondary school involves a degree of stress and anxiety, even for those who adjust quickly.

Research supports linking pupils who do not adjust quickly to secondary school to poor social, emotional and academic outcomes that can continue into adulthood (Rice et al., 2011; Riglin et al., 2013). This period is critical to a pupil's well-being, on-going learning and rapid growth and development (Holdsworth, 2010). Barber (1999) supports this view and describes school transition as "five bridges" that must be traversed. He identified the transition phases to comprise of bureaucratic, personal and social curriculum, a pedagogy which is the ecological nature of school and

management of learning domains. There is an aggregating acknowledgement for the significance of educational transitions for students. There are also different complexities that are often faced during this transition period.

According to Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Model, children are often faced with diverse complexities, including direct environmental influences and societal factors. What is clear is the ecological nature of school transition; when successful, provides hope for the future, new opportunities and challenges, greater responsibilities and the opportunity to change old habits and make a new start (Holdsworth 2010). Therefore, opportunities for transition intervention to increase student learning and well-being as they settle into the new environment are present during the secondary transition (Riglin 2013).

In addition, preparation and support are important factors in school transition. Anderson et al. (2001) noted that the less prepared a student is for the transition to secondary school, the more support and guidance he or she will need, resulting in a discontinuity gap. This notion of school transition quality is evident in the literature; for example, at the school level. Balfarz (2009) and Kimney (2011) argue that transition quality is enhanced by primary and secondary collaboration and information sharing; introducing transition teams; a supportive school environment; effective communication between home and school; knowledge of the social, emotional, academic, cognitive and physical needs of adolescents, particularly at-risk students (Balfarz, 2009); the skill development of teachers and school staff; and appropriate orientation and transition activities (Kimney 2011).

For the benefits to be accessed, there must be quality transition processes for all graduates. Basically, the transition environment should be able to support and nurture the interests of these students. All children need a quality transition process. Thus,

school programmes must be satisfactorily aligned to the requirements of graduates so that students encounter comfortable structures that enable the swift transition into secondary schools.

According to Hanewald (2013), the quality of the transition experience is influenced by teachers; family involvement and support; strong pre-transition peer relationships and an adolescent's own personal, social, emotional and academic skills (Topping 2011; Torres 2015). These factors, taken together, enhance transition quality and predict a positive transition experience. However, it is important to note that each factor in the transition experience is dependent on the individual, the school or institution, and the education system.

It is evident that there are key elements in a pupil's life that may affect the transition, compared to his or her peers. These studies determined that the social, emotional and physiological factors of a pupil or the learning environment affect the transition process of pupils. However, it is important to note that each factor in the transition experience is dependent on the individual, the school or institution, and the education system.

1.4 The Rationale for the Study

The experience of students throughout their transitions in school is a crucial matter that is often overlooked holistically. It is imperative that researchers, parents and even teachers be reminded of its significance and impacts. These students need diverse elements of support throughout this process, which can only be achieved by examining and understanding their experiences and challenges.

The aim of the fieldwork in this phenomenographic case study was to engage with the pupils and teaching staff participating in the Y7P, a school-based, primary-to-secondary transition initiative. The fieldwork was conducted in a respectful and ethically sensitive manner that allowed researchers to listen to participant perceptions and experiences of their transition to secondary school during the project. Listening to participant perceptions would enable me, as the researcher, to explore changes in their thinking during the first year of secondary school. Through listening to the pupils and teaching staff, and reviewing literature pertaining to the transition from primary to secondary school, I raised and explored three research questions, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

1.5 Purpose of This Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the pupils' and teaching staff's perceptions of the transition process as experienced during the Year 7 Project intervention that aimed at settling pupils into their new environment. The data gathered in this thesis are significant in exploring whether their perceptions of secondary school changed over time as they engaged in the transition initiative. While the participants' perceptions are the core focus, this study also engages the work of Professor Nancy Schlossberg on transition theories – a model for analysing human adaptations to transition (Schlossberg 1984; Schlossberg 1995). This model demonstrates the main characteristics of the transition process while discussing the components of transition in the light of current debates related to the Year 7 cohort at Erin Sinclair Secondary School.

Professor Nancy Schlossberg's transition theory is an effective model as it examines individual transitions and offers a language and support scheme around the students in the transition process (Schlossberg 1984). This process supported and was

identified as any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles (Evans 2016). The theory has four key tenets that demonstrate its significance and efficacy. They include Situation, Self, Support and Strategies (Evans 2016). In addition, DeVilbiss (2014) has used the theory model to understand the experiences and transition process of high school students conditionally admitted to college. She uses the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory "to understand the transition experience of traditional-age, first-time, full-time, conditionally-admitted students, attending a mid-size, four-year public university in the South Eastern region of the United States" (p.1). Despite the model being designed and established in an American context, with its comprehensiveness and versatility, it is appropriate for an examination of the Year 7 project's participants at Erin Sinclair Secondary School.

This research explored the experiences of the teaching staff and two groups of pupils who were part of a Year 7 transition intervention. The project was designed and undertaken in response to the need to evaluate the transition project and to address the gaps existing by exploring participants' views on the transition process. However, it is only within the last decade that a minority of studies have specifically sought to investigate the primary-to-secondary transfer and transition process in one space (West et al., 2010), creating what Lunham (2009) refers to this as a 'primary ethos' within a secondary school environment. Research by Lunham has tried to fill a gap in understanding the transition process by investigating the educational approaches for supporting young people at secondary transfer and developing previous work by researchers, including Philips (1968), Dutch and McCall (1974) and Galton (1983), who implemented early transition opportunities for pupils still in primary school. Questions remain, nonetheless, as to why so many pupils making the transition to secondary school still face anxiety at the beginning of Year 7.

Research reported thus far has indicated that students' excitement about new experiences, including meeting peers and teachers, can often be overshadowed by anxiety and stress. In this regard, this thesis investigates the transition by eliciting information from newly transferred pupils and teaching staff attached to the Y7P at ESSS through phenomenography, which explores perceptions and how they change over time (Marton 1996), in this instance, from the beginning to the end of Year 7. The findings of this study will be used by the school and other institutions or organisations interested in the primary-to-secondary transition to inform future planning on the transition of adolescents. West et al. (2008) identified that poor transitions can negatively impact the future of these children. Despite the variance in experiences, the findings of the research will form a good basis from which more improved outcomes of a transition process can be derived.

In this respect, considerable research has been conducted with respect to the primary-to-secondary transfer (Nisbet 1969; Youngman 1977; Galton 1983; Bruce 2010; Kraiss 2010). In the context of introducing a primary ethos to a secondary school, through the Eastbank Academy in Glasgow under the Eastbank Network for Academic, Behavioural and Learning Education (ENABLE), Bryan and Tranor (2007) aimed to improve the transition to secondary school for pupils at all academic levels, but particularly for those at risk of poor emotional development.

1.6 Research Context of the School-Based Year 7 Project Intervention at Erin Sinclair Secondary School (ESSS)

The setting for this study was Erin Sinclair Secondary School (ESSS), the pseudonym of a co-educational comprehensive secondary school in a large urban area in South East England. At the time of the study, the school had a population of approximately 1,200 pupils with an intake of mixed abilities. Approximately 70% of the pupil population spoke English as an additional language (EAL), and almost half of the

intake was eligible for free school meals. The study at ESSS was concerned with the Year 7 cohort, a large number of whom were EAL pupils. Reports from the feeder primary schools indicated that many pupils had not attained the national reading expectation (Level 4) in their Standard Assessment Task scores (SATs)¹ by the end of Key Stage 2 (10 to 11 years). As a consequence, these pupils were considered at risk of being unable to fully access the Key Stage 3 curriculum, therefore, they needed additional literacy support and regular opportunities to develop literacy skills.

With this in mind, the senior management team designed an intervention to support these pupils, which, for the purpose of this study, will be referred to as the Year 7 Project intervention. The project divided the incoming pupils into two groups based on their SAT literacy scores. This model was adjusted, however, and pupils with behavioural problems who had been assigned to the group with higher literacy scores were re-assigned to the intervention group, namely to those with lower literacy levels. As will be discussed later, this adjustment presented a problem for the study in determining its reliability. It should be noted that I was not involved in designing the project; as the research assistant assigned to the project, I used the project as the base for my research to fulfil the requirements for my Ph.D. Thus, I was able to explore the issues of transition, but only from the perspectives of the participants as they engaged with the project.

The Year 7 Project intervention at Erin Sinclair Secondary School (ESSS), which was designed and implemented by the school, was concerned with supporting pupils in making a successful transition to secondary school and providing extra support to those pupils with low literacy levels. ESSS is a co-educational, comprehensive

¹ SATs are Standard Assessment Tasks which include reading and spelling tests. SATs report on the achievements of the whole year group at the end of each academic year in the UK.

community school, in an urban area of South East England. It opened in 1999 with pupils transferring from a neighbouring school that is now closed. ESSS is at the heart of the community, and the local authority has pledged to involve the community.

Pupils attending ESSS range from 11 to 16 years of age. The school population is 1,202 pupils of mixed ability. The number on roll is fluid due to high levels of pupil turnover. ESSS encourages perfect attendance by awarding certificates to pupils at the end of the year. A majority of pupils speak English as a second language, which is higher than other similarly sized schools. As a result, literacy plays an important role across all subjects and underpins the decision to offer extra support for newly transferred pupils. According to the school prospectus, the teaching staff recognises that poor reading skills can cause loss of motivation, negatively affect behaviour and decrease attendance. All three aspects were evident in the project group of pupils on which this study focuses, and in the wider research literature by Higgins, Hall et al. (2005) in the first few months of secondary school.

For the allocation of groups, those identified as having low literacy levels and/or behavioural problems were placed in the project group of four classes and exposed to 'additional support'. Pupils in the comparison group did not, therefore, have the requisite skills or ability to fully access the Year 7 National Curriculum. The pupils designated as more academically able, evidenced by higher Standard Assessment Task (SAT) scores, were allocated to the comparison group of four classes (see Figure 1.1).

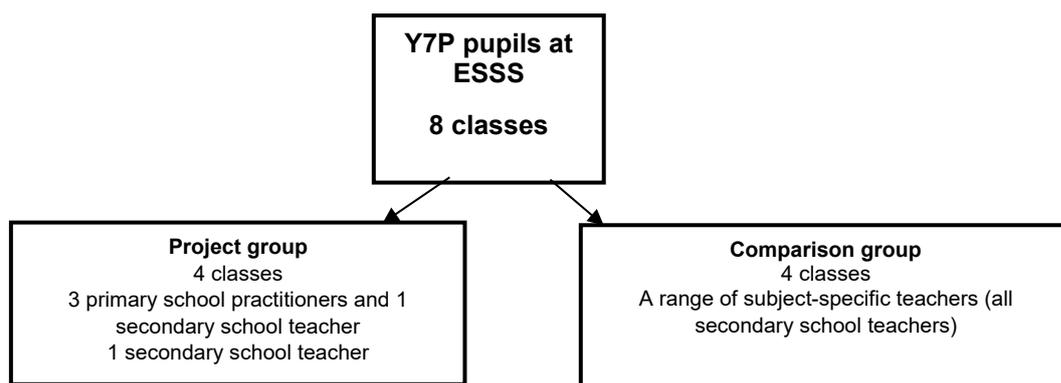


Figure 1.1 design of the y7p intervention

Prior to this initiative, which allocated pupils to a project or comparison group of classes, there was no grouping of pupils entering Year 7. However, in the four designated classes where the intervention was implemented, the adaptation of the curriculum and its mode of delivery aimed to reflect primary school pedagogic practices. The project involved taking four of the eight Year 7 classes and reorganising their curriculum to provide increased opportunities for mathematics and literacy. Each of these four classes was taught by their own dedicated teacher. Three of these staff were ex-primary school teachers. The fourth was a secondary school teacher, previously the head of Humanities at ESSS. These four project teachers were responsible for teaching English, Mathematics, and Humanities for about 15 hours a week. Subject-specific departmental staff worked with class teachers to team-teach science and technology.

The first change experienced by the four project classes was the mode of lesson delivery, which, by utilising the pedagogic style used in primary school, attempted to recreate a familiar atmosphere for pupils. In each of the four project classes, pupils had one teacher teaching four of their subjects in the same classroom, instead of having a variety of teachers in different rooms with different subject disciplines, as normally occurs in secondary school. With the four project classes, the pedagogic style of primary-school teaching involves one teacher for four subjects: Mathematics,

Literacy, Humanities and Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE). In trying to reproduce the atmosphere of the primary school, it was envisaged that the level of pupil anxiety experienced during the transfer and transition would be minimised.

Second, the Special Educational Needs support provision in each project class was increased. In most instances, this meant that a learning mentor was assigned to offer academic and social support, while a teaching assistant and/or member of the Special Educational Needs team was also present in each class. Third, for Mathematics and English, small group sessions of eight students with a teaching assistant were used to provide extra support for pupils who found it difficult to concentrate and work effectively in larger classroom settings. They were withdrawn from the main class to work in a smaller room.

The revised curriculum involved the elimination of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL), in this case, French. Given the significant number of EAL pupils who were already finding English challenging, the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) decided that, instead of taking MFL, students could better utilise their time by increasing the number of literacy lessons. By doing this, pupils were provided with four additional literacy periods in their timetable each week, without adding to the length of the school day.

1.7 Research Questions

This thesis critically explores transition by focusing on the pupils' and staff's perspective of their engagement in the Year 7 Project intervention project as the pupils settled into secondary school. Three research questions set out to identify the complexities that both pupils and staff faced during the move from primary to secondary school. By focusing specifically on the pupils who had additional support, a change in pedagogy and an amended timetable, the research questions examine

their perceptions, and how these perceptions changed over time as a result of engaging with the intervention. Therefore, each of the questions presents perspectives of the transition process and debated theories associated with the transition. Also, they provide an understanding of the challenges faced by pupils throughout the transition period.

The research questions were as follows:

1. What are the pupils' experiences and perceptions of the Year 7 Project intervention?
2. What is the staff's perception of the Year 7 Project intervention and pupils' learning before and after engaging with the project?
3. What factors in the Year 7 Project intervention affect a successful transition?

1.8 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is written with an intended view that is read through following a numerical order. However, the reader may decide to read particular chapter/s before the order in which they are presented. If read in succession, following this introductory chapter, the general literature review on relevant areas of the transition to secondary school, key challenges, perceptions of the transfer and transition to secondary school and themes pertinent to this debate are discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 presents the transition theory as presented by Schlossberg and its role and relevance within this study. Chapters 4 and 5 present a detailed discussion of the methodological approach and methods implemented for collecting and analysing data in this evaluative research from a phenomenographical perspective. Chapters 6 and 7 provide qualitative discussions regarding the perceptions of pupils and teaching staff in relation to their experience of the Y7P

1.9 Summary

This chapter presents this thesis by highlighting issues associated with the transition to secondary school and barriers faced by pupils during the process. Transition from primary to secondary school is an important part of pupils' academic journey. There remains a dearth of research in this area from the perspectives of pupils and teaching staff. Historically, transfer and transition have been explored from the perspective of either the primary or secondary school, each underpinned by distinct criteria: preparing primary-school pupils for the transition to secondary school or receiving pupils in the secondary school and helping them to settle into their new environment. What has been highlighted so far in this study is the need to focus on both perspectives supporting pupils whilst they continue their educational journey. The notion of learning and development continuity is an essential aspect to consider when addressing transition. Like many studies relating to the transfer to secondary school, the Y7P also focuses on personal and social factors, which include anxiety, self-esteem, self-concept, relationships with teachers and peers, and organisational and academic factors, such as environmental change, motivation, behaviour and academic decline (Rice 1997; Galton 2000; O'Brien 2001).

Chapter Two – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

According to Hargreaves and Galton (2002), past studies on transition have provided schools and other agencies with an understanding of the development and partnerships between schools. This allows some pupils a sense of security during the move to secondary school, but on the other hand, there are some whose transition disrupts the continuity of learning and for whom this may have a negative impact while settling into the new environment (Sharp 2010). The studies reviewed in this section show that certain factors impact on the transition. This chapter consequently reviews the literature on the transition from primary to secondary school and considers schools' attempts to address anxieties and settle issues that arise during this process. This literature review shows that some deeper issues directly impact on the settling-in process and may affect the learning processes of children in new environments.

By age 11, the majority of pupils in England transfer from primary to secondary school. To date, the persistent issues around this most critical time in a child's education journey have not been resolved (Galton 2000). In some cases, pupils making the move to secondary school lose focus, and they fail both academically and socially (Cauley 2006). In addition, for some pupils, the achievements and knowledge acquired at primary school do not translate to secondary school, thereby leaving them frustrated (Galton 1999). A government study conducted in 2003 highlighted that 21% of students, reflecting on their transition to secondary school, felt that their primary school did not prepare them for secondary school, and 15% said that they did not settle well in their new school (McGee 2003). Galton et al. (1999, p.10) in an earlier study point this out and argued that "students who have problems adjusting to their new school seemed to be less successful in their schoolwork". They further argued

that “teachers, policy makers and researcher[s] are increasingly aware of the importance of giving greater priority to transition if pupils are to sustain their commitment to learning” (p.9). However, almost two decades later after Galton et al.’s study, Ballantine et al. (2017) also argued that, a high proportion of students still regress during their first year of secondary school. According to a report by the Irish International Teachers’ organisation, the transition of students will continue to receive more attention and focus from the education community. Indeed, transition to secondary school will remain an issue and high on the education agenda until the transfer from primary to secondary school is understood in terms of the pupils’ learning process, coupled with their emotional well-being (Rose 2017).

Muschamp (2011) argued that the transition should be explored from small group interactions, while other early researchers, such as Delamont and Galton (1986) and Gorwood (1986), argued that understanding the classroom routines and the differences in pupils’ participation within them is equally important. They all recognised the impact of school size and building; the removal of the family unity that primary school offers; and relationships with peers, myths, and curriculum delivery. These studies established that schools need to determine how students perceive transition and provide them with the necessary support, such as structures and flexible school routines that motivate students. In addition to these issues, alternative transition research projects have focused on pupils’ reflections on their experiences post transfer (Evans et al., 2016). To date, little research has been done on the effect of a transition programme that has employed primary teachers to teach the core subjects at a secondary school. Muschamp (2001) supported the need for further research on the transitioning classroom, which may also address the potential cause of anxiety that can disrupt the students’ learning progression.

2.2 Early Research on Primary-to-Secondary-School Transfer and Transition

Between the 1960s and 1980s, little consideration was given to the views of children and their perceptions on new learning environments. Most of the early studies on transfer and transition to secondary school focused on pupils who did not transition successfully and examined practical issues such as curriculum continuity (Croll 1983), organisational features (Dutch & McCall, 1974) and the optimum age for transfer (Plowden, 1967; Nisbet & Entwistle, 1969). Some studies did recognise that moving from primary to secondary school could be stressful and interrupt the academic progress of students, but, despite the consideration of curriculum continuity and transfer records, it was concluded that a poor liaison between the primary and secondary school was to blame in some instances (Neal 1975; Gorwood 1986). Children in these studies were tested on their academic progress; there is little evidence that their experiences of transition from primary to secondary school were explored as part of the research. Some of these earliest studies were large-scale longitudinal studies (Nisbet 1969; Dutch 1974; Blyth 1978; Spelman 1979; Youngman 1979) that examined the ability and performance of the students during the time of transfer. Each of these studies followed thousands of children from their primary to secondary schools, mainly collecting data to measure academic achievement before and after the transfer.

Nisbet and Entwistle (1969) presented one of the few large studies carried out in Scotland, which investigated 3,000 children in Aberdeen for five years as they progressed from primary to secondary school. Their aim was to investigate to what degree age, ability and performance determined a successful transfer. These researchers also attempted to assess the ease of social adjustment by conducting a survey of the views of teachers and children and by examining other factors, such as socioeconomic backgrounds, parental involvement and social maturity. They

concluded that children from poorer homes, with less supportive parents, would have greater difficulty during the transition process. Nisbet and Entwistle (1969) also provided early evidence that social and motivational factors become more important when children move to secondary school. They concluded that children differ in many ways, that is, intellectually, physically, socially and emotionally, and that these attributes made it virtually impossible to specify whether a particular age would be best for school transition. This was also the view of the "Plowden Report" (Plowden 1967), which concurred that "wherever the age of transfer is fixed, there will be some children who would have been better left in the primary school, and some for whom the reverse would be true".

For these and similar reasons, England introduced middle schools and junior high schools (as did the US and Caribbean), with the intention of softening the impact of transfer. These schools enable the transition to occur at a later stage, when pupils are more mature. This idea was not introduced in Scotland. Dutch and McCall (1974) used a cross-sectional approach to compare one group of children, who had transferred directly from primary to a Scottish comprehensive secondary school, with two groups who had spent the final year of primary school in a transition department before moving to secondary school. Their results were inconclusive, partly due to the cross-sectional design of the study, but they showed some evidence of a small improvement in the social relationships of children who experienced the transition department compared to those moving directly to the secondary school. Whether this was due to the smaller size of the unit or simply the advantage of making friends from other schools a year earlier, was not made clear.

Youngman and Lunzer (1977) also explored the notion of measuring the ability and achievement of students to determine transition success. Additionally, they introduced dimensions of personality and attitude towards school. Using these factors, children

were tested before and after the move to secondary school, and six subgroups of children were identified. While four of these subgroups gave no cause for concern, two were particularly worrying and labelled 'disenchanted' and 'disinterested', as they showed little interest in schooling. However, of these two subgroups, Youngman and Lunzer argued that the disenchanted group qualified as a particular problem, as it consisted of children with a moderately high ability coupled with evidence of low achievement, with some indication of inferior performance. This was one of the first studies to consider ways in which children might react to school transfer other than through academic progress. The issue of disenchantment was not revisited until sometime later when the concept of 'disengaged' students was studied again in the 1980s by Horobin (2008).

Other writers who published research on school transfer and transition included Blyth et al. (1978), who, although still essentially focusing on the best age for transfer, added the perspective of self-esteem. Spelman (1979) also explored the transition to secondary school. Both studies used the concept of self-esteem rather than academic progress to measure how children adjusted to the move from primary to secondary school. The studies by Blyth et al. (1983) and Spelman (1979) found evidence that younger children moving to secondary school suffered a greater loss of self-esteem and participated less in school activities than older children making the same move. While they were uncertain of the reason for this, Blyth et al. (1978) suggested that older pupils might be able to cope better with a larger school, an increased number of children in a class and all the other changes to be made in the first year of secondary schooling. These studies showed that the impact of school transfer could be assessed by using methods other than ability and achievement.

Spelman (1979) examined the experiences of nearly 3,000 children during the transfer from primary to secondary school in Northern Ireland at a time when the

Eleven-Plus examination was still in operation. The results of this test determined whether the school children were ready to be moved. Similar to Nisbet and Entwistle (1969), Spelman (1979) found that the most successful pupils were those who tended to have strong parental support and were academically able, self-confident and socially aware. This comprehensive longitudinal study considered the sociocultural differences of children. Spelman (1979) explored several aspects of the secondary school context, such as teacher attitudes, discipline and motivational climate. In fact, it is one of the few studies to consider the changing disciplinary environment between primary and secondary schools. The study was conducted at a time when there were four different types of secondary school in Northern Ireland: grammar, secondary (intermediate), bilateral and junior high schools (Darmody 2008). Each had their own distinctive characteristics. It is difficult to draw any general conclusions, but regardless of school types in Northern Ireland, it was found that the quality of teacher/pupil relationships was particularly important in the pupils' adjustment. The study did not distinguish between successful transitions based on the type of school; rather, it determined that self-esteem, social consciousness and strong parental support encouraged a successful transition.

All these early studies recognised that school transfer is a significant, and possibly disruptive, milestone in the lives of children; the main emphasis at this time was to minimise the interruption to academic achievement and progress. The success of schools was measured in terms of sustained academic progress. Consequently, schools focused on the implementation of practical arrangements to help ensure a seamless continuation of study between primary and secondary education. Although the differences between children in terms of academic status was recognised, limited attention was paid to other areas that might influence academic progress at this time, such as the differences in students' personalities or backgrounds, or factors related to the school, environment or peers. Of course, there were notable exceptions to this

trend, as already identified; Nisbet and Entwistle (1969) recognised the importance of a supportive family background and linked it with the socioeconomic background of a child. They also emphasised, without giving specific examples, that children would vary in their ability to cope with transfer depending on their individual personalities. Spelman (1979) was one of the earliest researchers to introduce the concept of the school context, albeit in a limited fashion, by including measures of class discipline and teacher support. Indeed, the school context is important and will be discussed later in this chapter, however, it seems to have been largely ignored in these early studies.

Although the large-scale studies presented here focused on the transition and the age of the child at the point of transition, there is still a lack of understanding regarding the transition process and what happens during the first year after the move to secondary school. The arguments regarding the transition experiences were directly influenced by earlier discussions in education, which tried to bridge the gap between primary and secondary school. In the early 20th centuries, only the children from wealthy families were encouraged to pursue education after age 11. In industrial towns and the north of England, children with higher abilities attended the 'Higher Grade' at the age of 14 (Howe 2011). This discrepancy in education opportunities and the age at which children would change schools led to debate. The Hadow Report (1926) put forward an argument that children should change schools at age 11 and that all children should be given the opportunity to learn. The report, therefore, proposed that all children should be transferred, at the age of 11 or 12, from the junior or primary school either to schools of a specific type, now called secondary, central or senior, or to a separate department in the existing elementary schools. The report draws its conclusions from a number of issues that affect the transition process. For instance, the Hadow Report (1926) identifies that issues such as inconsistency in educational opportunities and the age for children could affect their transition process.

The notion of secondary schooling and its organisation was finally implemented after the Education Act (1944) in England was passed. The Act established that the state would provide three types of secondary school to meet the needs of the pupils. They were elite grammar schools, technical schools for the skilled and secondary moderns for those who did not show sufficient interest or aptitude for either of the previous two schools. The Act concluded that the best age for starting secondary school was 11. However, the debate on the best age for transfer to secondary school continued, and the discussion reverted to having one type of school for all children. In 1965, the Department for Education and Science (DES) noted that there was a conscious need to raise educational standards at all levels. The notion of deciding the type of schooling that would best suit children at age 11 – a decision that would affect their life journeys – was called into question (Goodson and Marsh, 2005). While the idea that secondary and primary schools were supposed to be different existed, by this time, middle schools in England and Wales had been introduced during a major campaign to end the Eleven-Plus and to establish comprehensive schools. In 1964, legislation was introduced to allow Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to establish middle schools that bridged the primary-secondary divide (Howe & Richards, 2011). Some LEAs reorganised their schools into three tiers – first, middle and upper schools – with justifications provided by the influential Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967). During the reorganisation of the schooling system, 1,500 middle schools were affected in England and Wales (National Middle School's Forum 2010).

However, by the end of the 1990s, and with the introduction of the National Curriculum, the number of middle schools had declined, despite arguments that they solved many problems associated with the transfer from primary to secondary school (Goodson and Marsh 2005). The secondary school system has reverted to a variety

of options, including community schools, specialist schools, grammar schools, religious charter schools and single-sex schools (Ward and Eden 2009). There are existing programmatic foci and aspects of these diverse secondary school options that have an impact on the transition processes. Factors such as cultures, religion, social structures and approaches to curriculum progression largely affect the transition (Benavot and Resnik 2006).

A review of the literature on the transition to secondary school showed that a generally negative attitude is demonstrated by the students towards the process. Most scholars refer to the transition as 'problematic for pupils' (Anderson 2000), 'challenging' (Ward 2000), 'critical' (Galton et al., 2003) and 'stressful' (Rice et al., 2011). For the most part, the terminology used to describe the transition process has been negative.

2.3 Impact of Transition Research

Lucey and Reay (2000) argued that daily life is complex and can be especially so when transferring from primary to secondary school. For pupils, the transition process should be a continuous and seamless process that prepares and equips the child with the skills, knowledge and understanding that enables the move from one learning environment to another. Therefore, literature relating to the transition to secondary school should not only be portrayed as an isolated experience, but also as showing an understanding that it is a part of the continuum of learning. In exploring the literature by removing the context of research, existing systems, evaluations of orientation programmes and policies, the only remaining component is the child. The child, in this case, is a single commodity in a rich learning environment. The child portrays the realm of experience, expectation and knowledge of what is to come and what is being left behind.

If we are to understand the transition, the notion of *childhood* should be understood. Childhood is a time of innocence and vulnerability. Norozi and Moen (2016) indicated that diverse approaches and methodologies have been employed to study the notion of childhood. Childhood is perceived as a distinct phase of life that offers a child social construction to become a more competent and productive member of society (ibid.). Lucey and Reay (2000) noted that the modernist theory suggests that behavioural and emotional changes are a breaking of traditional ties that fragment the structures of everyday life. Post modernism argues that everyday changes fragment experience by dissolving structural and social forces. However, in exploring both theories, the child is considered within discrete structures of transition. If Galton et al.'s (1999) perceptions of successful learning are of a confident and articulate child, then these views have the potential to develop and diminish concepts of oneself and one's learning identity.

For a successful transition, schools have to develop a transparent module in which practitioners view the process as open and honest in terms of assessment and data transfer. Thus, the receiving school collates valid data that enable the teacher to assess a child's ability accurately and ensure successful fluidity of the child's learning. The combination of the sociological perspectives offered by Galton et al. (1999) and Lucey and Reay (2000) questions the transparency of transferring from primary to secondary education. Galton et al. (1999) and Lucey and Reay (2000) identify that it is imperative that pupils be given the necessary support throughout the transition process despite challenges.

In Lucey and Reay's research (2000) with two focus groups of ten children, they argued that children who transfer from primary to secondary school experience mixtures of anticipated excitement and fear. This is further reiterated by concluding that transition can significantly impact on a child's perception of self and induce an

apparent loss of identity. Evangelou et al. (2008) and Evans et al. (2010) concluded that children who are most at-risk from transfer are those who are younger, less mature and less confident in their learning and language capabilities; in addition, they come from non-academic backgrounds, often from deprived backgrounds, or have faced problems with their primary teacher. Lucey and Reay's study describes the whole transition process as a huge emotional burden for these students. The study identifies that it is important that the transition process be adequately managed to guarantee a positive emotional and learning outcome.

The experience of this transition has a direct impact on the future lives of pupils and their likelihood of becoming a learner for life. Anderson et al. (2004) argued that a poor transition to secondary school can lead to a lack of success at secondary school, which, in turn, can affect the lives of pupils. Events occurring during the adolescent phase of development have a great influence on pupil behaviour during the transition. It is paramount at this point, therefore, to review the literature on pupil experiences during the transition to secondary school and their impact on educational success (Hanewald, 2013).

In addition to the adolescent phase of development, Kruse (2001) argued that, during the transition to secondary school, children experience a number of changes: physical, social, intellectual and emotional. A study conducted to determine the relation between motor abilities and cognitive learning abilities among German primary students identified that 'fostering the children's physical fitness during the primary school age could enhance both motor and cognitive learning abilities related to the academic achievement' (Abdelkarim, Ammar et al. 2017). They further argue that as pupils transition to secondary, their cognitive ability develops further; although not all pupils may have developed reasoning abilities at the concrete level, some move towards higher order thinking at the abstract level. In addition, at this life stage,

pupils are also more reflective and experience physical changes at the same time. They are now concerned with their physical appearance, friendships and emotional and social change, as well as adjusting to the new school environment (Chamot 1987). A feeling of change in status is apparent and significant because they are now the youngest in the school (Wigfield 1991).

Moving to secondary school represents the onset of adolescence, which is complicated by a number of developmental changes and experiences – all happening at the same time. The onset of adolescence, as Rice et al. (2011) argue, is a phase of the struggle between identity and role, which impacts on emotional and psychological adjustment. Transferring pupils experiencing this struggle tend to question who they are and what they want to do with their lives (Walker 2007). Hamm et al. (2011) added to these struggles when positing the view that making friends and socialising within new environments is challenging during the move to secondary school. In other words, there is a mismatch between the developmental needs of adolescents and the environment of the schools they attend. Researchers argue that it is imperative for teachers to pay significant attention to these needs so that the new environment reduces anxiety, and positive learning is experienced (Oxford 1999; Guskey 2012).

2.3 Key challenges during the transition to secondary school

One issue that arose from earlier studies was that the researchers did not follow the actual events which took place during the transfer to secondary school. Instead, many researchers measured the transfer and transition process through the academic progress and attitudes of pupils while they were still in their feeder school and then again at another period after the transfer (Galton, 2002). While this may offer some understanding of what happens during the transfer from primary to secondary school,

or provide information on those who are affected by the change in school environment during the transition process, it fails to provide enough information or adequate explanation of how or why the transition affects children (Youngman & Lunzer, 1978).

2.3.1 The ORACLE study

In an attempt to address these issues, Galton (1983) explored transfer and transition from a different perspective through a project referred to as the Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation (ORACLE) transfer study in the United Kingdom.

Galton et al. (1999), examined the progress of 2,500 pupils in England over a period of 27 months from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, and revealed several causes of stagnation in pupil learning in the transition from primary to secondary school, a pattern exacerbated by low teacher expectation of pupils in the first year of secondary schooling. It was found that one third of pupils in Year 7 performed less well than they had at the end of Year 6 at primary school. In a significant number of cases, teachers were engaging pupils in learning opportunities at a level below their ability or revisiting curriculum content without developing progression thereby causing a decline in their learning.

The ORACLE study paid close attention to pedagogy and the manner in which pupils responded to lesson delivery. ORACLE studied 58 classrooms drawn from 19 primary schools, and 300 observations of pupils were made plus a further 180 observations of teachers. A cohort of eight pupils in each participating school was observed for the entire day during the first three days of the new school year. During the remainder of the study, both pupils and teachers were observed for a day at regular intervals throughout the first three years of secondary schooling. The conclusion of these

observations confirmed previous claims that there was very little attempt to maintain continuity between the two phases of schooling with respect to either curriculum content or teaching methods. Many of the teachers began from basics with the assumption that primary school work was not serious or disciplined (Galton et al., 1997).

Galton et al. (1999, 2000, 2002) later noted that transfer marks a “hiatus” in progress and that achievement occurs only in up to two of every five pupils during the year immediately following the change of school. Galton et al. (2002) recorded that 38% of Year 7 pupils failed to improve their results in mathematics, language use and reading by the end of the transfer year compared to scores obtained one year before in the feeder school. The data also revealed a correlation between transition, a slump in progress and a drop in pupil motivation.

A decade later, Galton et al. (2002) revisited the ORACLE transfer project in a replication study. This replication was important, since, following the introduction of the National Curriculum, no systematic research of substance which examined the impact of transfer on pupil progress had been carried out. Due to funding issues the replication team reduced the scale of the study and rather than following pupils for three years, as in the original ORACLE study, observations took place in one year.

Another change was the number of pupils observed and how they were observed. In the original study, a delay of two years occurred because the team followed pupils for two years in their primary school before following them in secondary school. This was problematic because there was no guarantee that these pupils would remain in the same class, set or groups after transferring to secondary school. Galton et al. (2002) argued that it was paramount that the participant observations were carried out during the first three days in secondary school. Therefore, in the replicated ORACLE transfer

study, systematic observations were carried out during English and mathematics periods in two sets containing the highest numbers of pupils from the top and bottom quartiles respectively. This differs from the original study where eight targeted pupils were observed. In the replication study, six pupils from the primary school were selected randomly but it was not possible to determine whether they were top, middle or bottom in their groups.

Overall, the team did not find much difference from the original study in terms of understanding what happens during the transition. Their work, however, prompted further research which extended beyond using essays and questionnaires to examine transition. Later studies, instead, explored self-esteem and other personal factors associated with transfers to secondary school.

Following the original and replication ORACLE studies, more thought was given to the implications of how pupils felt, particularly with regard to competence, motivation and self-esteem. Notions of pupil engagement and well-being, although not widely considered, were also examined to describe pupil satisfaction and adjustment to secondary school. There was a steady but growing realisation that problems in pupil behaviour might be partly attributable to the school environment itself and not solely the consequence of relatively unalterable factors such as socio-economic background, parental support, and academic ability (McAlister 2012).

2.3.2 Curriculum continuity

One long-term and perpetual issue in the transfer/transition debate is the lack of curriculum continuity and coherence across the primary and secondary school phase. The curriculum focus in the UK emerged from the Education Bill in 1979 after the

election of the Conservative government. The central objective of the Education Bill was the setting up of the National Curriculum which had as one of its main objectives the establishment of curriculum continuity which would avoid the unnecessary “duplication” which many pupils suffered when moving from one school to another (Baker 1997). The National Curriculum saw the beginning of increasing state intervention in the field of education which was to take place throughout the next decade despite the rhetoric of “market forces” philosophy (Galton, 2002, p.12).

Research in the area of curriculum continuity in secondary schooling also indicated gaps in subject content, inconsistencies in pupil expectations and unnecessary differences in teaching and learning practices (Croll 1983; Kruse 1996). In the UK, it was thought that the Education Reform Act 1988 which led to the introduction of the National Curriculum in England, Wales and Northern Ireland would solve the problem of continuity across the curriculum. In spite of some improvements, a lack of continuity remains between the two school stages, with different content and language used in some subjects (Howe 2011).

The ORACLE study designed by Galton which was one of the biggest studies in Britain in the 1980s, indicated few similarities in curriculum continuity in terms of content and teaching methods across both stages. Pupils faced new terminology and carried out procedures which were different from those in primary school and such changes contributed to academic decline and loss of motivation in some pupils (Galton et al., 1999). However, in the intervening period between the original ORACLE study and the replicated study 20 years later, research findings on transfer and transition showed that little had changed. A lack of curriculum continuity persisted between primary and secondary schooling, different content and the use of different language in some subjects remained, familiar skills and knowledge were repeated in

some cases and little attempt was made to find out what pupils had actually done at primary school (Hargreaves 2002).

A number of researchers reported that primary school pupils had misconceived ideas about secondary schools in terms of what to expect and the level of academic adjustment (Galton 1983; Mizelle 2000; Galton 2003; Vogler 2008; Krais 2009; Lui 2011). Primary school teachers also reported similar misconceptions of secondary school. Equally important, secondary school teachers were unaware of activities in the primary school, and this influenced the quality of work that newly transferred pupils received in the early weeks of secondary schooling (Galton, 2000). Fundamentally, Galton and Hargreaves (1999) pointed out that little had changed in the delivery of the curriculum and thus the hiatus in pupil learning continued.

The first ORACLE study established that over 40% of pupils failed to make progress in English, mathematics, and reading comprehension after transferring to secondary school (Galton 1983). However, this finding was based on fewer than a hundred pupils and the differences in scores were relatively small. It may be more appropriate to assert that pupils have been found to experience an interruption in progress rather than a decline in overall performance.

Declines and interruptions in learning during the transition period were also observed in the US and these have been attributed to differences between the school sectors in relation to educational demands, teacher attitudes and classroom organisation (King-Rice 1997). Decline in pupil performance over the transition period was also more pronounced among low income and minority pupils (Simmons 1987; Eccles 1993).

In addition, teaching methods were also found to differ between primary and secondary school with a shift from an emphasis on pupil involvement in discussion to one where pupils were expected to listen to the teacher (Stables 2003). Compared with primary schools there was more emphasis on setting exercises based on textbooks or worksheets and few opportunities for group discussion or hands-on experimentation, additionally, more adult-dominated teacher-pupil exchanges were found with the emphasis on imparting information (Hargreaves & Galton, 2002). The transition from primary to secondary schooling has been characterised as a move from a pupil-centred environment to one which is more structured and teacher-dominated from a pupil perspective with the shift and change in environment as argued by Bruce et al. (2010) and Ferguson and Fraser (1998) found that the quality of teacher-pupil interaction differed as pupils saw secondary school teachers as less helpful, less friendly and less understanding than in primary school.

In another UK research project, West et al. (2010) found that the majority of pupils in their study of over 2,000 Scottish pupils had adjustment difficulties to both school and peer social systems at the beginning of secondary schooling. This was due more to the personal characteristics of the pupils than social-demographics and the role of the primary school.

Cause for concern about transition was raised by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) which sought to evaluate both the primary and secondary school National Strategies regarding the effectiveness of transition processes in light of serious concerns arising from Ofsted reports (2002).

What has been discussed here is the importance of curriculum continuity between primary and secondary school during the transfer and transition process. Although the National Curriculum was, in part, designed to address this problem, there remains

a lack of continuity across these two stages despite all the work and recommendations made.

While curriculum continuity can be the main cause for declining pupil performance, factors such as psychological well-being, anxieties, self-esteem and other personal factors may contribute. These factors are discussed in the following sections.

2.3.3 Psychological well-being and its impact on transition

As mentioned in the previous section on curriculum continuity, psychological well-being has a direct impact on pupil learning and development during transition. The following discussion identifies the factors that contribute to pupil psychological well-being and their impact on the transition to secondary school. Psychological tendencies are directly related to specific cognitive, emotional and social changes, as discussed later in this section, which are influenced by the environment (Campus 2008; Dalton 2009). The results of these changes in schools may be positive or negative depending on the support received by pupils and the nature of the environment in which they are nurtured (Campus 2008; Dalton 2009).

Important aspects of the transition to secondary school are the sense of belonging and well-being experienced by pupils. A strong sense of belonging, and feeling and being socially connected, may lead to high motivation and grades. According to Cueto et al. (2010), pupils with a low sense of belonging may feel alienated at school, which, in turn, may cause poor achievement and eventually dropping out of school.

When pupils move from one class to another, from one school to another and later from school to further or higher education, they experience many emotional changes. These changes are experienced simultaneously with physical development or

biological transition. As children move through different stages of physical and psychosocial development, they experience various emotions at each level and stage. Spano (2004) argues that during adolescence there is great change for young people who encompass physical changes which occur at an accelerated rate as well as experiencing cognitive, social/emotional and interpersonal changes.

The many emotions that pupils in transition experience depend largely on which factor or factors sway their thinking. An assortment of emotions such as happiness, sadness, relief, excitement, anxiety and apprehension are indicative of the emotions children experience when they move from one situation to the next (Spiegelberg 1960; Spano 2004). It is generally accepted that such emotions are characteristic of the adolescent years, which are noted as being a particularly difficult time for children (Campus 2008). Additionally, during adolescence children are confronted with all the psychological challenges associated with leaving one stage, childhood, and entering another, adulthood.

2.4.3.1 Cognitive transition

Cognitive transition is concerned with ways of thinking and how it impacts the phenomenon in question. Steinberg (2001a) identifies five ways in which cognitive transition is evident during early adolescence from 10-14 years. First, individuals become better able to think about what is possible, instead of limiting their thoughts to what is real. They can think hypothetically. Second, during the passage into adolescence, individuals become better able to think about abstract ideas. They also begin thinking more often about the thinking process itself, or metacognition. As a result, adolescents may display increased introspection and self-consciousness. Further, adolescent thinking tends to become multidimensional, rather than limited to a single perspective and whereas children tend to think about things one aspect at a

time, adolescents can see things through more complicated lenses. They are also able to understand that personalities are not one-sided and that social situations can have different interpretations. Finally, adolescents are more likely than children to see things as relative, rather than absolute. They are more likely to question the assertions of others and less likely to accept facts as absolute truths (Steinberg 2001b).

In support of the above assertions, Eccles et al. (2003, p.325) view “the increasing ability of youth to think abstractly” as the most important cognitive transition. As primary school pupils make the transition from childhood to adolescence, they begin to engage in more sophisticated and elaborate information-processing strategies (Eccles 2003). From an analysis of human development, Sigelman and Rider (2012) concluded that basic perceptual and attention skills are perfected during adolescence. Eccles and Roeser (2009) added, it is during this period that adolescents are better able to sustain their attention and use it “selectively and strategically” to think through and solve problems.

2.4.3.2 Social transition and adolescence

It is almost impossible for adolescents to develop biologically, cognitively and emotionally without social connections or relationships. Steinberg (2001) refers to these social links as contributing to the social transition of adolescence. As children move to adolescence, the time spent with friends and family greatly influences how they cope with various changes along the way. Peers have a greater influence on the social development of adolescents than family members which is due, in part, to the length of time spent with peers.

Friendships that existed in the primary school years may move to another level in early adolescence which usually occurs during the transition. Steinberg explains that friendships change in significance and structure, noting four specific developments. First, there is a sharp increase during adolescence in the length of time spent in the company of peers compared with that spent with adults. Second, during adolescence, peer groups function more often without adult supervision than they do during childhood. Third, during adolescence increasingly more peer contact is with opposite-sex friends. Finally, whereas peer relationships in childhood are limited mainly to pairs of friends and relatively small groups — three or four children at a time, for example — adolescence marks the emergence of larger groups of peers, or crowds (Steinberg, 2001b). In addition, social connection and peer relationships were investigated in a US study by Martinez et al. (2011) who found a correlation between perceived social support and social-emotional functioning at the end of elementary school.

For clarity, it should be noted that friendship and transition as a part of interaction within crowds is different from that with peers. A crowd is a group of people who share similar, and sometimes the same interests, attitudes or behaviours. Individual members of a crowd may or may not operate on a friendship basis, and therefore may not “hang out” together. The “tight” comradeship of peers during early adolescence brings another aspect of development into focus which is the need for intimacy. Issues of trust are paramount for there is a belief that having others who “think” like you is a sound basis for friendship (Steinberg 2001a; Mayseless 2007). This suggests that the transition from one school to another can interrupt such friendships and can be problematic for pupils. While relationship networks can expand in the transition to secondary schooling (Colin, (2002), it is not always the reality since not all “friends” are transferred to the same school. In order to reduce anxiety during the transition process, it is necessary for pupils to retain a friendship group.

Social rather than academic concerns often predominate in the minds of pupils before transferring to secondary school (Hargreaves & Galton, 2002). However, many pupils in a New Zealand study were found to be concerned with the difficulty of school-work and the amount of homework they would receive (Ward, 2000) while pupils in a British study were not looking forward to mathematics, homework and English (Hargreaves & Galton, 2002). The transition is found to be associated with different academic standards and exposure to a wider variety of subject areas taught by different teachers (Walsh 1995).

2.3.4 Transfer and transition anxieties

As indicated, there are a number of factors that affect pupils during the move from primary to secondary school. Some pupils making this move find the process challenging and anxiety is exhibited. This section discusses some of the anxieties and other factors that may impact on pupils making the transition to secondary school.

Among the many difficulties pupils face in their educational career, the transition from primary to secondary school has been regarded as one of the most problematic as highlighted by Marshall (1988) who observed that the transition from primary to secondary school is seen as the biggest step for moving from one stage to another of the educational process. This was also echoed by Parris and Kates (2003) and Zeedyk and Gallacher (2003). Transition is also seen to be “a major cause of anxiety” among pupils (Dalton 2009) with some losing their confidence and self-assurance. Murray (2004) adds that starting secondary school is one of the most stressful stages in the education of a child by exchanging the familiarity of the local primary school for an imposing secondary school.

Given that anxiety is an issue among some young people (Dalton 2009), it follows that anxiety during the transfer and transition process can contribute to a less successful transition. Anxiety is linked directly to pre- and post-transition issues experienced by some pupils. Since anxiety is caused by different factors, it is open to being interpreted in different ways (Driessen 2008; Dalton 2009).

Early transition studies measured pupil anxiety prior to transfer in order to provide a baseline to compare anxiety at the end of the transfer year (Nisbet & Entwistle, 1969; Youngman & Lunzer, 1977). Several studies have reached similar conclusions: pupils are anxious before transfer, but become less so by the end of the second term (Youngman 1979; Measor 1984). Later studies demonstrated similar pupil concerns (Schumacher 2003; Nemeth 2007). The first signs of anxiety emerge at the pre-transfer stage in the final year of primary school. In Year 6, anxiety begins to heighten as pupils wait to find out whether they have been accepted at the secondary school of their choice and the results of their SATs (Nemeth 2007).

Anxiety has been identified as one of the main causes of unsuccessful transition for some pupils. While research has indicated the negative impact of anxiety on adjustment to secondary school (Wigfield 1991; Chung 1998; Lucey 2000), other studies have revealed little or no increase in pupil anxiety after their transfer to secondary school (Hirsch 1987; Proctor 1994). Researchers and educational psychologists exploring psychological distress in relation to transition anxieties attribute this lack of raised anxiety to pupils' experiences prior to, and after, transfer. In spite of the anxieties or psychological distress at, or around, the time of transfer, research has found that only a minority of pupils experience serious difficulties once they have moved to a new school (Hargreaves 2002).

An alternative view of the transfer and transition process is proposed by Barbalet (2001) and Lucey and Reay (2000) who suggest that anxiety can also have positive effects contending that transfer can be envisioned as an opportunity to move forward into an unknown future. Barbalet (2001) regards the anxiety experienced during transfer as essential in helping to mobilise adaptive responses to sometimes disturbing circumstances and changes. This assertion concurs with an earlier study by Phillips (1993) who argued that worrying implies a futuristic way of looking forward to the unknown. Other pioneers of transition research, Measor and Woods (1984) along with Youngman and Lunzer (1977), adopted a similar position, arguing that anxiety can have a positive impact on pupils. Likewise, Giddens (1993) supports the idea that anxiety should not be viewed as a negative aspect of the transfer process but as a way forward that stimulates thinking about the future.

Research underpinning the alternative perspectives of anxiety propounded by Lucey and Reay (2000) and Barbelet (1998) reveals that pupil anxieties and perceptions of secondary school are sometimes influenced by horror stories and myths communicated to them by their peers. Lucey and Reay argue that myths only occupy part of the pupil imagination while other parts remain uncontaminated, suggesting that if anxieties are addressed appropriately by the primary school, these may be lessened. Lucey and Reay further assert that anxiety which emerges during the preparation for secondary school provides a highly fertile ground within which half-formed, ambiguous and contradictory fears, fantasies and hopes could be planted. This anxiety can also be derived from the capacity and necessity for the individual to think ahead and to anticipate future possibilities in relation to present situations.

Pre- and post-transfer occurrences can contribute to the anxiety experienced by pupils. In turn, anxiety affects self-esteem and self-concept as well as relationships with family members, peers and even teachers. Also, lack of motivation, decline in

academic achievement, the completion of homework and discipline can be affected when routine curricular and pedagogical regimes are interrupted (Lawrence, 2006). These stressful factors directly affect social and academic adjustment during the first year of secondary schooling, as well as other transition periods in life. However, it is the transition from primary to secondary schooling that seems most problematic as this event prepares individuals for the other transfer and transition processes that come about at various stages of development (Hirsch 1987; Lord 1994; Jackson 2000; Galton 2003). These findings also reveal that anxiety leaves an indelible mark on the academic, social and personal performance of pupils.

2.3.5 Self-esteem and self-efficacy in the transfer and transition process

Self-esteem is globally recognised as the affective dimension, or how one feels about oneself, while self-concept is the cognitive part of self-perception (Lawrence 2006). Essentially, self-esteem falls within conceptions of the self. The development of self can be viewed as a process of becoming more aware of personal characteristics, feelings about self, and the effect of attainment levels (Lawrence 2006). Feelings of self-worth and self-esteem increase from perceptions of where an individual is in relation to others and those who are influential in their lives. Coppersmith (1967) showed that people usually assess their success in terms of power, significance, virtue, competence and achievement, which together formulate self-concept or self-image. This self-imagery grows as the person develops through interactions with the environment, beginning with family relationships, and extending to teachers, friends and others in the school environment.

Low self-esteem is a risk factor for a broad range of psychological and behavioural problems (Emler 2001). However, evidence generated from research about the effects or the causes of low self-esteem is still unclear. Emler (2001) has tried to

bridge the gap in understanding by highlighting the lack of consensus regarding the nature of self-esteem, maintaining that one of the most significant divisions in the field of psychology concerns whether self-esteem is a generalised feeling about self or the sum of a set of judgements about personal value, worthiness and competence in various domains.

Lawrence (2006), on the other hand, explains self-esteem in terms of sections and sub-sections. Lawrence concludes that self-esteem develops as a result of interpersonal relationships within the family, which gradually gives priority to school influences, as well as the influences of the larger society in which the individual chooses to live and to work.

Research has shown a link between self-esteem and attainment levels among children (Lawrence, 2006). Some forty years before Lawrence, work by Coppersmith (1967) found that positive attitudes equated with positive evaluations and self-respect while negative attitudes were associated with negative self-evaluations, feelings of inferiority and lack of personal worth. However, other research has shown that where examination or academic achievements have been satisfactory, self-esteem ratings may still be low (Pope 1988; Eccles 1991).

Self-esteem and self-concept therefore, are not static. They are affected by home and school environments and are measured by how a person is feeling at a given point in time. However, research has highlighted that positive self-esteem and self-concept are associated with greater academic achievement, positive interactions with teachers, and parental support (Lord 1994; Smith 2008).

Wigfield et al. (1991) in the US conducted a large longitudinal study of 1,850 pupils investigating school adjustment in early adolescents. Pupil self-concept was explored

in four domains, namely mathematics, English, social activities and sports, along with a more global measure of self-esteem. The research found that, on average, self-esteem scores declined across the transition to junior high school, between 10 and 13 years, but subsequently increased during the first year of transfer. Findings also revealed that self-concept, in relation to specific performance domains such as mathematics and English diminished due to changes in the school and classroom environments to which pupils were exposed. It was found that while some pupil self-views were more negative during the transition process other pupils were unaffected and some were more positive. The findings concur with those of Lord et al. (1994) who argued that pupils with greater confidence in their academic, social and athletic abilities in Grade 6, between 10 and 11 years, were associated with gains in self-esteem following the transition to junior high school, between 11 and 13 years.

Proctor and Choi (1994) presented an alternative view of Grade 7 pupils, 11 to 12 year olds, in the US. They noted that during transfer and transition, self-esteem and perceived competence were not negatively affected according to reports by the pupils. Proctor and Choi also assessed the general self-worth and perceived self-competence of pupils in the cognitive, social, and physical domains. Findings were based on self-report questionnaires administered in the spring of Grade 6 and during the fall of Grade 7, approximately two months after the transition to junior high school. The results indicated that general self-esteem and perceived competence in the cognitive, social, and physical domains either remained stable or increased from Grade 6 to Grade 7. However, it is possible that the results of their study were skewed by the fact that the pupils in Grade 6 moved to the transferring school with peers from their primary school or with children who lived in their neighbourhood as this was the normal transition in that geographical area. This finding is in contrast to many current situations in the UK where parents have the option to send their children to local secondary schools or those outside the local area.

Within discussions of self-esteem, it is important that self-efficacy is also mentioned. Le Page (2010) explains that self-efficacy, the belief an individual has in their ability to complete a task, may vary significantly depending on the task undertaken. This suggests a direct link between self-efficacy and confidence for if an individual feels incapable of doing a specific task their self-efficacy may be affected. When self-efficacy is at low levels it impacts negatively on the transition between different levels of personal and educational development. It is very important that teachers help pupils to have positive and successful experiences in order to build self-efficacy.

It is these kinds of accomplishment that will help pupils to achieve at school and beyond. Goal-setting exercises utilising positive communication and cognitive behavioural therapy are suggested as ways to increase self-efficacy (Edelman 2007; Le Page 2010). However, teachers should be careful that in their quest to increase self-efficacy, they do not belittle pupils or make them feel inadequate to the extent that they need special attention which can decrease pupil self-efficacy and lead to inadequate effort being put into their work. Tasks given to pupils should be challenging and the praise given worthy, not merely for the sake of giving praise. It is only when levels of self-efficacy are high that pupils will work hard and persist in the face of setback (Heslin 1999).

Self-efficacy is ongoing and does not stop at the end of compulsory schooling. There are implications for broader education systems, structures and related policies. In addition to the focus on pupil progress, the self-efficacy of teachers should also be taken into consideration. If teachers are not confident and dissatisfied with their delivery of lessons, they might have low levels of self-efficacy which in turn could impact negatively on pupil self-efficacy. Studies have shown a correlation between self-efficacy and teacher job satisfaction and pupil progress (Milson 2003; Skaalvik

2009). Reviews of research on efficacy agree that teachers who display high self-efficacy tend to exhibit greater levels of enthusiasm, are more open to new ideas, more willing to try a variety of methods to better meet the needs of their pupils, less judgemental and work longer with those who are struggling (Milson, 2003; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009).

2.3.6 Pupil motivation and the transition to secondary school

The link between motivation and learning is well established. Galton (1999, 2002) highlighted the importance of motivating pupils during the transition period. Pupils who are motivated have more than just an interest in learning. They are energised and demonstrate determination to achieve their goals by initiating action, expending effort and application. Tararko (2010) argues that when a person is motivated by a particular goal much effort is put into its achievement. Tararko added that the effort expended by pupils is associated with the desire and willingness to reach the goal. Further, their effort is accompanied by a positive attitude toward the activity. Hein (1991) sees motivation as a key component that is essential for learning. However, motivation can easily become deflated during phases of transfer and transition.

[2.4.6.1 Motivation and academic decline](#)

It is important to understand that differences in adjustment have both immediate and long-term consequences for pupil perception, behaviour and motivation. For example, an initial decrease in grades for a pupil who has poor coping skills or weak social support could lead to negative self-perception that undermines their academic motivation. For those pupils moving to secondary school with poor academic motivation, a drop in grades may further reduce their motivation level.

Fenzel (2000) argues that reduced motivation, in turn, can become a self-fulfilling prophecy if it leads to a subsequent decline in performance, and perhaps to eventual disengagement from school. Conversely, when pupils who have greater personal and cognitive resources experience an initial drop in grades, a different trajectory can develop. Wampler et al. (2002) argue that the initial drop in grades may challenge the academic competence of pupils in a way that motivates them to work harder. Pupils who have been exposed to the necessary skills, knowledge and work habits are able to draw upon those resources to successfully recover from lowered grades (Berndt 1995). Thus, subsequent improvements in grades not only reinforce their generally positive self-perception, but also their academic motivation.

Prior to the first ORACLE study in 1983, research into transfer and transition might have presumed a significant correlation between academic progress, motivation and enjoyment of school. However, Galton et al. (1983), along with Postlethwaite and Haggerty (2002), dispelled this assertion by demonstrating that there was a small but significant negative correlation between progress and enjoyment at school. This finding highlights the reality that some pupils, although doing well academically, do not express positive attitudes toward school. Galton et al. (2000) further argue that although some pupils were doing well academically, they were being "turned off" school:

We might expect strong positive association between pupils' academic performance, motivation and enjoyment of school on the assumption that underachieving pupils find school less attractive and are not motivated to work hard (Galton et al., 2000, p.357).

As mentioned earlier, researchers have offered a variety of explanations for the negative changes that occur in motivation and behaviour as a result of transition. Many studies have attributed changes in motivation and behaviour to the lack of effective transition programmes involving communication and planning between the

feeder and receiving school (Galton & Hargreaves, 1999; Ofsted, 1999, 2000; Galton et al., 2000). Other studies suggested that the changing nature of educational environments experienced by pupils could be responsible for the academic decline in literacy associated with transition (Dutch 1974; Youngman 1977). However, Eccles et al. (1993) suggested that pupils who arrive at school to find developmentally appropriate and well-managed classrooms are more likely to enjoy school, attend regularly and grow academically.

2.3.7 Family background and its influence on transition

Astin (1984) suggests that involvement with family members is one factor that determines how pupils use their time at school. Families are crucial to educational progress and an important source of support for pupils during school transition. While responsive and developmentally sensitive parenting is a protective factor in the transition process (Eccles et al., 1996) if the family of a pupil is not functioning well, does not solve problems, is unsupportive and communicates poorly, then psychological and behavioural problems can result which may impede successful transition (Lord 1994).

The relationship between socio-economic background and educational outcome is now attracting greater attention (Grolnick, Kurowski et al. 2000) and is currently recognised as one of the most significant factors bearing direct influence on whether pupils adjust to secondary schooling (Anderson 2000). Pupils from lower income homes and those from minority ethnic groups have been found to be potentially more “at risk” in making the transition to secondary schooling (Nisbet 1969; Gutman 2000; McAlister 2012).

While socio-economic characteristics are important, research findings show parental support to be critical in facilitating pupil success during the transition process (Anderson 2000). In exploring the relationship between parental support and the transfer process, Eccles et al. (1993) studied familial authority structures in the US finding that being given opportunities to participate in family decision-making was predictive of better adjustment to secondary schooling. Pupils whose parents did not involve them in this process did not adjust as well.

In another US study, Lord et al. (1994) found that how a child perceived their family environment influenced their adjustment to secondary schooling. The research team reported that pupils who indicated having experienced open family relationships tended to have higher self-esteem, more positive thoughts about school experiences, and adjusted well. Successful adjustment was attributed to parental support of autonomy, the quality of the affective relationship between parent and child, and parental investment in providing opportunities for their children outside the home (Lord 1994).

Similar findings were noted by Nisbet and Entwistle (1969) in their UK study which reported that the extent of parental encouragement significantly influenced the transition process. Levels of parental education, home literacy and environmental factors were shown to vary significantly between pupils who made successful transitions and those who were less successful. Family influence, in particular parental support, was found to strengthen positive beliefs about educational success in the new environment of the secondary school (Zeedyk 2003).

2.3.8 Transition and the change in environment

Changes in the school environment have also been linked to difficulties during transition (Eccles 1991; Eccles 1993; Hertzog 1996; Ferguson 1998). While the school environment is perhaps one of the most documented factors in transition literature, Darmody (2008) and Eccles et al. (1993) suggest that a poor person-environment fit exists between individual developmental needs and the practices of secondary schooling.

An Australian study by Ferguson and Fraser (1998) examined changes in the learning environment during the transition to secondary school. Findings suggested that changes in the physical environment occur at both the macro level of the school and the micro level of the classroom level. The researchers observed that the large, impersonal structure of secondary schools could not meet pupil needs at this developmental stage, especially when pupils are experimenting with various types of behaviours and identities.

Furthermore, Dutch and McCall (1974), Eccles et al. (1996) and (Howe 2011) highlight a mismatch between classroom characteristics and the needs of transferring pupils. In the secondary classroom there is greater emphasis on discipline and teacher control, and less on continuity in pupil learning. Measor and Woods (1984) similarly emphasise that the change from a class-based, female-dominated environment with motherly attention, to an environment dominated by males, although this is steadily changing, could increase the sense of loss, as the experience may be linked to losing a person who was regarded as a maternal figure.

2.3.9 Pupil experiences of the transition to secondary school

Moving to secondary school represents the onset of adolescence which is complicated by a number of developmental changes and experiences all happening at the same time. The onset of adolescence has been described as a phase of struggle between identity and role which impacts on emotional and psychological adjustment (Rice 2011). Transferring pupils experiencing this struggle tend to question who they are and what they want to do with their

lives (Walker 2007). Hamm et al. (2011) added to these struggles when positing that the making of new friends and socialisation within the new environment were also challenging during the move to secondary school. This means that there is a mismatch between the developmental needs of adolescents and the environments of some of the schools they attend. Researchers argue that it is imperative for teachers to pay significant attention to these needs so that the new environment reduces anxiety and positive learning is experienced.

While some recognise adolescents as a distinct social group, to others they are forgotten. This prompted Hatton (1995) to describe adolescents as “the Cinderella student group or forgotten component of schooling”. Given the relative invisibility of adolescents, it becomes all the more important to examine their experiences to identify their perceptions about schooling during this important phase of their lives using a different methodology. Phenomenography, which focuses on the perceptions as experienced by participants facilitates the aim of this study which is to examine pupil and teaching staff experiences during the transition while it is being experienced and to identify the issues and challenges they face. It is anticipated that the study may contribute to a better understanding of adolescents in transition by adopting a methodology not yet used in studying experiences of transition to secondary schooling. This is not to claim that no other methodologies seek participant perceptions, only that none has explored perceptions using phenomenography.

In reviewing literature on secondary school transition and participant experiences of moving to secondary school, a lack of empirical evidence that discussed their first term after the transition was found. The majority of research presented in this chapter along with other research not included, has used quantitative methods to measure pupil transition success. This lack of empirical evidence using pupil experiences of transition requires urgent attention and a study such as this will inform the impact of transition on pupils.

The argument put forward in this chapter thus far has supported the need to research student experience of transition as it is being lived. This study is unique and relevant as it not only uses a research methodology previously unused to study the transition to secondary schooling, it also focuses on the entire academic year not merely the initial few weeks of the

transition period. It is possible that the findings of this research have implications for educational institutions to become more aware of transition issues and in some cases provide more relevant programmes and educational experiences to enhance the development of the social and cognitive skills of pupils.

It is anticipated that this study which was conducted throughout a Year 7 initiative will provide insightful data of particular relevance to the teaching staff and senior management team at ESSS, the school at which the research took place. It is possible that the findings generated by the study might also have some relevance and value to other schools that are interested in implementing a transition programme that is alert to participant views. Therefore, a phenomenographical methodology will provide an approach that helps to illuminate the lived experiences of participants in a manner that offers deep understanding of the experienced transition to secondary schooling.

2.4 Secondary School Transition Interventions and Programmes

Adjusting to the changes associated with the transition to the secondary school environment, as well as to its new institutional and social systems, can be anxiety-provoking and difficult to negotiate (Zeedyk 2003). The period of apprehension around the transition from primary to secondary schooling can be part of a normal response to change that promotes positive adaptation to the new environment (Lucey & Reay, 2000). For the majority of pupils, worries about transition appear to be relatively short-lived and to decline during the first term at secondary school. Nevertheless, it is widely accepted that the primary-to-secondary-school transition can negatively affect the emotional and psychological adjustment of pupils, as manifested in a range of school behaviours, including poor attendance, lower grades and behaviour problems (Sirsch 2003; Zeedyk 2003; Akos 2006; Smith 2008; Smith 2008). In a survey of Scottish pupils, Zeedyk et al. (2003) found that the most common concerns were connected with bullying, getting lost, increased workload, peer relationships and new

environments and routines, with the fear of bullying being the most commonly reported concern. These concerns are directly linked with the new environment and the social changes and expectations associated with the transition to secondary schooling.

The staff, parents and teachers have a responsibility to ensure that these children are well prepared for successful transitions by affording them the necessary support. Students ought to be academically and socially ready for this transition. For instance, in a stratified UK national sample, or Evidence for Policy and Practice Information (EPPI) project, organised by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), a substantial majority of the pupils who participated were identified to have received some formal support in preparing for the transition to secondary schooling (Evangelou et al., 2008). The EPPI report noted that support included a universal programme developed to smooth transition, which included induction days and selective programmes targeted at vulnerable pupils (Rice et al., 2011). Developing programmes or interventions that promote a positive transition to secondary schooling is important because a poor transition can set in motion a chain of events that may negatively impact future adjustment and academic attainment. Pupils who do not adjust to the new challenges of secondary schooling are at risk of becoming demotivated and potentially disengaged from school (Wassel 2007). Lack of engagement has substantial implications for the ability of pupils to fulfil their academic and personal potential. Indeed, poor transition to secondary schooling has been shown to have deleterious impacts, not only on pupil adjustment, for example, in the form of depression and low self-esteem, but also on academic attainment beyond compulsory education (West et al., 2008).

Given this background, future research and interventions focusing on the primary-to-secondary-school transition should find it a necessity to understand the perceptions

of participants during the transition period. Vaz (2010) states that the transition process has varied experiences, and its effects are never uniform. In most highlighted studies, the data were collected at one point in time or over a short period, whereas in this study at ESSS data were collected at the beginning and end of the academic year. It is essential to collect data in this manner for the study because the transition process and its outcomes cannot be discerned fully unless the whole experience is examined. In support of this comprehensive examination of the experiences, Rice et al. (2011) put forward three intrusions during the transition that can be examined. First, stress and anxiety are widely experienced by pupils, even those who adjust well to secondary schooling. Second, poor transition is associated with concurrent psychological problems. Finally, a poor transition can set in motion a chain of events that impacts future attainment and adjustment. Rice et al. (2011) further argued that, despite evidence highlighting the potential benefits of positive transition, important questions remain to be addressed. For example, it is still unclear which pupils are most likely to experience problems with the transition. There are still relatively few studies focused on the primary to secondary transition period. Most studies have focused on a single aspect of transition adjustment, such as academic attainment (Galton, 1999), self-esteem (Lawrence, (2006), exploring the great divide between primary and secondary schooling (Howe & Richards, 2011) or adolescent development (Richards, (2011).

In reviewing research that addressed the primary-to-secondary transition, little evidence of intervention programme evaluation was found. In order to gauge this shortcoming, specific criteria were used in the search for studies between 2000 to present. Studies had to include all of the following: programme support for the transfer to secondary schooling, the use of transition measures and, finally, pupils attending mainstream schools. Results from the search identified four intervention studies that contributed to pupil support during the primary-to-secondary-school transition.

| Studies and Title | Significance |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
|--------------------------|---------------------|

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|--|--|
| Galton et al. (2003). Transfer and transition in the middle years of schooling (7-14): | The study identified the significance of providing students with the necessary and adequate support for a successful transition. |
| Howe & Richards (2011). Bridging the transition from primary to secondary school. | The study highlighted the varied experiences in the transition process and identified how measures can be instituted to ensure that the transition process is effective. |
| Rice & Frederickson (2011). Assessing pupils concerns about the transition to secondary school | The study put forward three perspectives of intrusions during the transition that can be examined and that will relate properly to the research participants. |
| Wassel et al. (2007). Transition: A universal issue. | The study identified that lack of engagement has substantial implications for the ability of pupils to fulfil their academic and personal potential. |

Table 2.1 studies of primary school to secondary school intervention programmes

The students' well-being and the learning curriculum are factors that need to be considered for a transition process to occur. It has been identified that the transition process is often affected by the social, emotional and physiological changes within their class. The studies above were chosen with the perception that they focus on the elements that alter the transition process. From the table above (Table 2.1) of the studies, it is apparent that the individual experiences and environmental factors are largely examined throughout.

West (2010) and Bloyce and Frederickson (2012) concluded that there is little research into studies that evaluate the interventions related to support programmes for pupils after the transition to secondary school. They also discussed that, while a range of designs have been used to measure transition success, the results were mostly positive. For example, Reyes et al. (1994) used a randomised control group, while others (Elias 1986; Green 1993; Qualter 2007; Rosenblatt 2008) used a range of interventions that focused on preventive measures to help students cope with middle school stressors, achievement loss and emotional intelligence competencies in easing transition. Walsh-Bowers (1992), in a Canadian study, used non-equivalent

middle school comparisons that explored the use of a creative drama prevention programme for easing the early adolescent adjustment to secondary schooling. In addition, Shepherd and Roker (2005), through The National Pyramid Trust, offered a predominately descriptive evaluation of a transition initiative incorporated into an after-school programme, which had no group for comparison. Bloyce and Frederickson (2012) used a Transfer Support Team (TST) in the final year of primary school and for up to six sessions in the first term at secondary school. The study garnered information on school concerns and broader adjustment measures from TST-supported pupils. The findings of the study identified that the brief transfer support programme had a significant impact on the pupils. The study herein demonstrates the significance of segregated monitoring of intervention outcomes.

The lack of literature and studies on intervention programmes during the transition to secondary school suggests that there is potential to improve effectiveness, to refine the context and delivery of interventions (Vitaro 2008) and to evaluate outcomes.

The UK and a number of other countries have implemented transition programmes to assist pupils in making the move to secondary school. The aims of these transition programmes have been, usually, to set up senior management team activities and strategies designed to ease the transition journey and support pupils struggling to overcome social, intellectual and physical challenges by reducing anxiety and increasing a sense of belonging (Field 2002). In addition, Legters and Kerr (2001) examined types of practices specifically designed to promote a ninth-grade transition in the US. They found that less emphasis was given to supporting transition pupils than addressing high failure and dropout rates. The study highlighted the transition process and other intervention programmes. It also elaborated further on facets of the transition process by highlighting why it is essential to involve primary and secondary schools in facilitating the transition to secondary school. Bearing in mind the

numerous reasons for implementing a programme, its type or design is paramount. While many secondary schools have implemented formal orientation programmes to ease initial fears and anxieties, it has been argued that less structured orientation programmes would enable pupils to feel more comfortable when finding their way around and asking questions (Jindal-Snape 2008).

2.5 Summary

In reviewing the literature on secondary school transition and participant experiences when moving to secondary school, a lack of empirical evidence regarding their first term after the transition was found. According to Lucey and Reay (2000), transition is a complex subject infiltrated by multiple facets that make discerning variances within a short time difficult. Goodson and Marsh (2005) also identifies that there exists an array of complexities that make the transition process a difficult concept to understand. There is a preponderance of research that uses quantitative methods and highlights the limitations from the lack of empirical evidence regarding pupils' experiences of transition. The concept of understanding the transition to secondary schooling requires a detailed assessment or study to attempt to distinguish substantial variances within the first term or, generally, a shorter period. This thesis, therefore, aims at attaining its objectives by not only examining the major aspects or durations of the transition process, but also by focusing on the entire academic year.

One issue that arose from earlier studies was that the researchers did not follow the actual events that took place during the transfer to secondary school. Instead, many researchers measured the transfer and transition process through the academic progress and attitudes of pupils while they were still in the feeder primary school and then again at another period after the transfer (Galton 2002). While this may offer some understanding of what happens during the transfer from primary to secondary

school or provide information on those who are affected by the change in the school environment during the transition process, it fails to provide sufficient information or an adequate explanation of how or why the transition affects children (Youngman & Lunzer, 1978).

Chapter 3 Transition and Transfer – Theoretical Perspectives and Policies

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of theoretical perspectives and policies related to the transition of pupils to secondary schooling. The nature of transition suggests an ongoing story of changes throughout life. When put in the context of education, these changes may be linked to several education theories and theoretical perspectives. The three education theories presented in this section are transition theory and person-environment fit theory.

While the influence of Bronfenbrenner (1979) is apparent in these and other recent studies, it is highly evident from the literature that there is currently no widely accepted and unifying theory or model for school transition. The socio-ecological model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) will be operative for this study because it identifies the human development aspects and relates them to the environmental features, which is the goal of this research.

3.2 Transition Theory

In many transition studies, the chosen theoretical focus was from the socio-ecological model proposed by Bronfenbrenner in 1979. This model recognises that children's experiences of transition points are influenced by their own capabilities and skills, as well as by the contexts that surround them, such as family, friends, teachers, the school context, the broader community and the policy environment (Bronfenbrenner 1978). However, the transition theory from the field of developmental psychology states that unique and challenging life transition is accompanied by a rapid adaptation

to new and more difficult tasks, which have been recently applied in school transition with some success (Benner 2009; Serbin 2013).

Transition theory is typically classified as a theory of adult development, but it can be applied to learners of all ages (Schlossberg et al., 1995; Evans et al., 1998). In the context of primary-to-secondary-school transfer, transition theory enables provision for support to be given to pupils. This support is associated with the removal of obstacles likely to hinder a smooth transition. Considering the anxieties caused by transition (Dalton 2009) and that starting secondary school is deemed one of the most stressful stages in education (Murray 2004), support for pupils in transition is crucial. During this stage, support can help pupils to regain lost confidence and build up low self-esteem, both of which are sometimes diminished during the 'moving through it' stage (Schlossberg et al., 1995; Dalton, 2009).

Meleis (1986) and Schlossberg (1981) shared a similar notion of preconceived ideas before the move and the experiences after the move. They posed several questions about the transition that are still of importance today and, more specifically, to this research. These questions include exploring *the differences between individuals and within the same person at different times in life, what determines whether a person grows or deteriorates as the result of a transition?* and *Why do some people adapt with relative ease, while others suffer severe strain?*

To address these questions, this study adopted a modified version of the Schlossberg model (Figure 3.1), which offers guidance in understanding and helping individuals as they face transitions. The model focuses on attitudes towards transition and four areas that provide insights into preparing and supporting pupils for their move to secondary school.

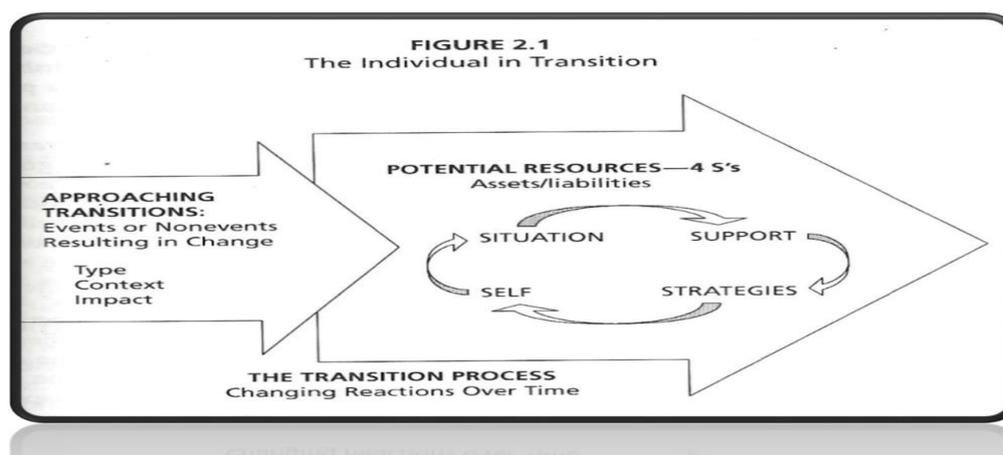


Figure 3.1 the individual in transition (schlossberg, 1984)

Initial thinking of the transition theory was coined by Schlossberg et al. (1984, p.27), based on the view that transition is “any event or non-event that results in a change in relationships, routines, assumptions and roles”. Banner (1991) shared this view, adding that transition is interactional, as opposed to a process-stage, as put forward by Schlossberg et al. (1995). Their view has proved influential in the discussion and understanding of transition as a means of ‘analyzing human adaption to transition’ (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p.2). Banner contended that transition is affected by three main variables: personal perception of the transition, characteristics of the pre-transition and post-transition environments and characteristics of the individual. This argument sparked the modification and refinement of the transition theory posited by Schlossberg et al. (1995), which led to the formulation of the Theory of Adult Development. Schlossberg (1984) hypothesised that the transition process has three segments: anticipated, unanticipated and the non-event. She further states that ‘the transition theory can be applied to students who are young or old, male or female, minority or majority, urban or rural’ (p.13). The theorist asserts that there are ways in which change can be assimilated into the operations of an individual, whether young or old.

The 4S's – situation, self, support, and strategies – are significant in providing a medium for change. She indicates that adopting a change or transition can be fostered by confrontation with the transition process or change. This exploratory and phenomenological study aims at examining a process where most of these students are confronted by change as they try to adapt to a new environment, thus making the model more reliable to the study. While this more developed theory continued to offer insight into factors related to transition, it focused more on the role of the individual and the environment in being able to cope with the transition. To support this view, Evans et al. (2009) successfully used the theory of adult development to support students making the transition from secondary school to college and this study will employ the same principles exploring the transition from primary to secondary school.

The perspective of the above scholars informs the current research, which offers a way to gain an understanding of the transition process and support schools, teachers, parents and pupils coping with the critical move to secondary school. Zeedyk et al. (2003) identify that the transition from primary to secondary education is one of the most challenging stages of a student's education career. Schlossberg's model offers an insight into the factors related to the transition process and why it poses a challenge to students. Its focus on the relations between individual aspects and environmental factors makes it suitable for the case study.

Schlossberg et al. (1991) surmised that an individual can experience a transition in one of three ways in his or her life: through an anticipated transition, unanticipated transition or non-event transition. While the notions of anticipated and unanticipated transition can be usefully appropriated to explore the move from primary to secondary schooling, transition as a non-event is potentially less useful because such transitions are often expected to occur, but never happen, in most cases. Schlossberg et al. (1984, 1995) contended that *anticipated transition* refers to the individual who actively

knows that the transition from primary to secondary schooling is happening. Unanticipated transition, however, is experienced by an individual who either cannot foresee the move or experiences it as unexpected, unplanned or unscheduled, as with a sudden change in circumstance resulting from the death of a family member or being placed within a project on the first day at secondary school. A non-event is one that is expected but does not occur, such as an unsuccessful application to secure a place at university. These three ways (anticipated, unanticipated and non-event transition) of experiencing transition resonate with the design of the Y7P intervention. As pupils were aware of the transition, there was an element of anticipation; however, they also experienced unanticipated transition because they were unaware of the content of the project and did not know what to expect.

Schlossberg et al. (1995) argued that transition is a process that takes place over time and will vary from person to person. They also posited that the transition process can have a positive outcome or a negative outcome. In addition, the four factors, namely situation, self, support and strategy, impact the outcomes, whether favourably or unfavourably. Known as the 4S's (see Table 3.1), the factors relate to how individuals cope with transition-related tension. Schlossberg et al. (1995) added that the coping mechanisms of individuals are firmly dependent on their strengths and weaknesses with regard to the three areas of the transition process: 'moving in', 'moving through' and 'moving out' of the transition (Figure 3.2).

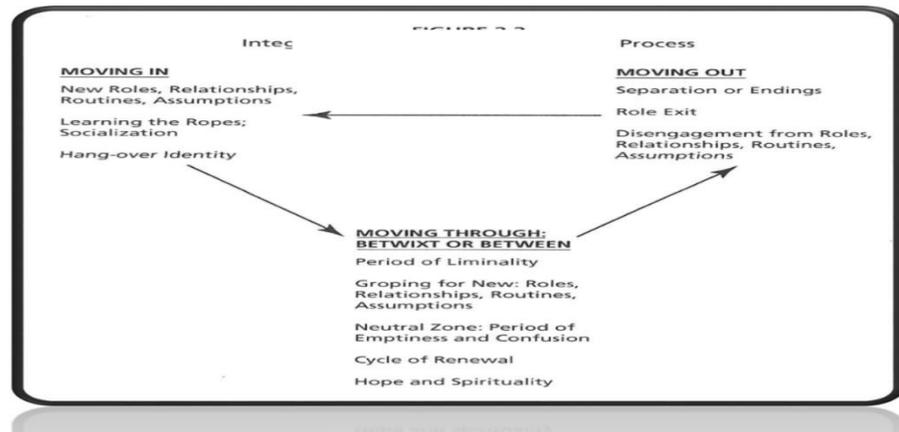


Figure 3.2 integrative model of the transition process (Anderson et al., 2012, p.56 Based on Schlossberg, 1985)

To assist in understanding how each individual copes with the anticipated transition, in this case, the transition from primary to secondary schooling, a discussion of the 4S's is paramount. Schlossberg et al. (1995) transition theory adapted by Goodman et al. (2006), outlines the 4S's and their role in helping individuals to cope with the transition in, through and out of the transition process.

Schlossberg's transition theory and the 4S's suitably apply to the transition process that will be examined in this study. The first S, which signifies *situation*, represents everything encompassed in the primary-to-secondary transition. The model questions what has triggered the 'situation' and whether the education process is a timely and systematic process that has no outside influences other than an individual's capacity to settle into the new environment. The children who are examined herein have total control of their situation and are moving into a new chapter of their lives with new roles and challenges that they are eager to explore.

The second S, which is *self*, assesses the personal and demographic characteristics of the children. Do these children have the psychological strength to face new tasks and environments? Are they able to cope with the new environment? This concept will thus examine the personalities, attitudes, hopes and self-esteem of the children

to assess their transition. Reflecting on the paradigm will help to determine how the students can receive adequate *support* (third S) for a successful transition process.

The fourth S, which is *strategies*, remains to be among the objectives of the study. A thorough implementation of the three first S's will provide the research with adequate strategies to inform students about how they can properly adjust to change and develop personal strategies.

| Stages in the Hackney/Cormier Model: | The 4 S Transition Model: | | | |
|---|---|-----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| | Situation | Self | Support | Strategies |
| Relationship Building | Counselor Uses Basic Listening Skills | | | |
| Areas to Assess | Client's Environment | Internal Resources | External Resources | Current Repertoire of Coping |
| Sample Client Goals | Modifying the Environment | Return to Equilibrium | Increasing Support | Developing an Action Plan |
| Possible Counselor Interventions | Reframing, Assertion Training | Positive Asset Search | Referral to Support Group | Problem-Solving Strategies |
| Termination Follow Up | Counselor Helps Client Review What Has Happened and Plan Next Steps | | | |

Table 3.1 The 4S's transition model (Goodman, 2006, p.184, adapted from Schlossberg et al., 1985)

An explication of the 4S's in Table 3.1 is needed in order to illustrate how each factor can be related to the Y7P transition initiative. For instance, the first factor in the transition model, *situation*, comprises timing, control, role change, previous experience, concurrent stress and assessment issues. In terms of the Y7P, these elements refer to the positions and roles of the pupils and teaching staff. The second factor built into this model, *self*, consists of personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources, whereas *support* specifically focuses on sources of support, such as family members, friends and institutions and the functions of support, including affect, affirmation and honest feedback. Finally, *strategies* embrace categories that can modify situations, control meaning and manage stress, in addition to coping modes, which include information seeking, direct action and inhibition of

action. The 4S's are important in framing how individuals cope as they move into, through and out of the transition process.

There are many features of the 4S's transition model that resonate with this study. These students are ejected from the accustomed, nurturing and compassionate environments to a detached, non-supportive and quite feasibly daunting environment. The change in conditions is quite a challenging phase in their lives. This change in environment and how they adapt to it make the concept appropriate for examining the transition process by systematically studying it through the 4S's lens. In the first instance, the transition to secondary school, as suggested by the model, reflects an anticipated event, which most pupils do experience which includes, the 'move in', 'move through' and 'move out' stages. These stages highlighted in the model can be likened to a continuum that is planned by the feeder primary school, which enables the receiving secondary schools to prepare pupils and provide the necessary resources and support. Second, the model outlines the interaction between the individual and the environment. The use of adapted classroom environments, as outlined in Chapter One, at the receiving school cited in this thesis highlights the fact that Year 7 pupils are not passive in the process.

Equally important is the support that pupils can offer each other as they manage their transition journey as efficiently and effectively as possible. Notably, the 4S's transition model is a valuable contribution to transition theory because it connects human experiences and environmental occurrences as they move in, through and out of the transition process. The 4S's model is also valuable because it identifies reactions to any transition change by adequately understanding the factors that foster transition and how one can adapt to them. The model shows that adequately supported individual pupils are able to manage environmental change, rather than allow events to unfold along the transition journey (Schlossberg 2011).

As has been established so far, the transition is not easily defined, as different meanings are attached to it, according to the context in which it is used. Nonetheless, transition theory may be applied to the individuals or groups making a transition or to environmental transition. Researchers Silverman et al. (2009), using a different theoretical perspective, described it as “a lens for analyzing the human response to transition”. A study by Meleis (1986) on transition and change in the field of international nursing focused on the structure and organisation of nursing knowledge. Meleis (1986) gave an expanded version of transition theory when describing transitions as periods in which change takes place in an individual or an environment and which possess certain commonalities. To explain, Meleis (1986) identified traits that are common to all types of transition. These include disconnection from previous social connections and supports; the absence of familiar reference points, such as objects or persons; the appearance of new needs and/or the inability to meet old needs in accustomed ways; and an incongruence between former sets of expectations and those that prevail in the new situation. All these aspects that were studied by Meleis apply to the current research objectives. Schlossberg’s theory also attempts to analyse traits throughout the transition process and how an individual reacts or relates to these traits. The paradigm demonstrates more significance and value of the transition theory to this study. As a person who assumes a lifespan interpretation of transition, I was motivated to incorporate the Schlossberg’s transition model in the study to provide a wide-ranging comprehension of the primary-to-secondary-school transition process.

3.2.1 School Transitions and the Person-Environment Fit Theory

School transitions are inevitable, from pre-primary to primary school, primary to secondary school, and for some, secondary school to college or university. Driessen et al. (2008) reported that school transitions are linked to negative changes in the functioning of many adolescents, particularly in the realm of academic achievement. According to Chedzoy and Burden (2007) and Driessen et al. (2008), the decline in interest among adolescents in school accompanies a decrease in their intrinsic motivation, self-concepts/self-perceptions and confidence in their intellectual abilities, all of which have been attributed to the transition from primary to secondary school.

This study values and supports the person-environment fit theory, in which Dawis (1992) states that every individual has a working environment with which he or she is compatible. The relationship the environment presents between the abilities of a person and the demands of a specific job or the desires of a person and the attributes of a specific job (Kristof-Brown 2006). The primary-secondary school transition process highlights the vital link between these two relationships, as it provides an understanding of how pupils cope with changes at an individual level. In addition to the individual nature of transition process experiences, Eccles and Wigfield (2002) report that school transitions are linked to changes in the functioning of many adolescents, particularly in the realm of academic achievement. If not addressed appropriately, a decline in their interest in school could be the result at the end of the first year of secondary schooling (Chedzoy & Burden, 2007; Driessen et al., 2008).

The person-environment fit theory makes a link between individuals and their environment, which at times presents a challenge for individuals. The theory of person-environment fit resonates with the work of Vygotsky, who argued that scaffolding and the role of the adult were important in assessing a given situation in

order to provide the appropriate environmental changes needed to encourage learning and adaptation. The children who are examined herein are not capable of discerning how environmental factors can affect their learning. The person-environment fit theory proposes that pupils are not passive participants in the transition process, needing to fit neatly into secondary schooling; rather, it makes allowances for change and adaptation at all levels of schooling to fit the needs of the individuals. Vygotsky's work thus attempts to highlight the roles of schools and parents to identify and correct environmental challenges that might impose an impediment to the transition process and learning outcomes.

In a general context, Eccles et al. (2002) view the person-environment theory as the fit between the characteristics that individuals bring to their social environments and the characteristics of these social environments. The level of fit, they contend, influences the behaviour, motivation and mental well-being of individuals such that they are unlikely to do very well or be very motivated in social environments that do not fit their psychological needs. These perspectives were also discussed and supported by Benner and Graham (2009) and Cueto et al. (2010).

While the school environment is noted for academic learning, adolescents use this arena for social interactions. Given that the social environments in secondary schools may not fit well with the psychological needs of pupils transferring from primary schools (Shepherd 2005), the person-environment fit theory is able to account, to some extent, for the decrease in achievement, motivation and overall performance of some pupils. Eccles et al. (2002) identify a number of contextual shifts that accompany school transition, including moving to a larger school where more bureaucratic and controlling social systems prevail. While the new environment is associated with a more heterogeneous social system, the social context affords less personal contact with adults. Larger schools are also held to provide fewer

opportunities for pupils to be engaged in school activities and assume responsible school roles. A more rigid and socially comparative grading system and curriculum-based tracking also characterise the larger schools to which pupils move (ibid.).

These changes are part of a bigger picture that involves the ability of teachers to deal with change and new situations. The large-scale Effective Pre-School Primary Secondary Education (EPPSE) study of children from 3 to 14 years old, funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and published in 2008, shows that transition creates problems for pupils as well as teachers, and that there is a need to address these issues. EPPSE recommends that teachers be made aware of and given strategies to deal with bullying and other situations that may arise. Implied in the study is the understanding of how stressful this period between 3 and 14 years is for young people and their families and how teachers need to be sensitive to issues that arise among the students.

3.3 Transition Policies and Educational Reforms

Policies typically outline specific requirements or rules to be met. They are usually point-specific, covering a single area. In the field of education, a policy is often a plan of action used by schools, which is expected to bring about positive results. The transition from one phase of education to another is considered sufficiently important to have policies that ensure good practice by schools. For instance, the final report of the influential and wide-ranging Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum (2009) made twenty-five policy recommendations, of which, seven are directly connected to transition.

Along with schools, Local Authorities in the UK have also given attention to transition in their policy documents. For example, in Wales, the importance of transition was

recognised in The Education Act 2002, where it was seen as a key commitment of the Welsh Assembly Government to raising standards at KS3 in ways that built on achievement in primary schools (Powell et al., 2006). In addition, the final report of the Transition from Primary to Secondary School: Current Arrangements and Good Practice in Wales (Powell 2006) noted that continuity and progression in learning were a part of school improvement and raising the achievement of pupils. Another goal of The Education Act 2002 was to promote mutual respect, partnership and professional development within and between schools and teachers across the local educational community in Wales. There was also provision to ensure that education programmes included curricular and organisational arrangements for transfer. Finally, the report aimed to reduce underachievement and disaffection due to the problems of transition (Powell 2006).

In addition, The National Strategies Strengthening Transfer and Transitions Project (2008) was an initiative for change to support pupils making the transition to secondary school. This report supports the perspectives of Powell et al. (2006) and provides a coherent framework that can be adapted to support pupils making the transition to secondary school. The objective of this initiative aims to create an environment for autonomous learners by providing the opportunity to increase pupils' capacity to manage the learning process as they move into, through and out of the primary-to-secondary transitions. The national strategies outline seven conditions that can be applied with the aim of maintaining and raising educational standards during the transition to secondary schooling. The seven conditions listed are designed to support young people in a positive and holistic way during the transition (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009, p.5).

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Transfers and transitions are key drivers in raising standards.2. Assessment for learning principles underpin progress across transfers and transitions. |
|--|

3. Pupils need the confidence, understanding and skills to advance their own progress across transfer or transition.
4. Partnership working 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 experiences and a common language.
7. Sustained collaboration requires structures and systems that support formal and ongoing links between partners.

Figure 3.3 seven conditions to support transition outlined by the department for children, schools and families

While these conditions represent what a transition project should emulate, the Strengthening Transfer and Transitions Project provides five additional outcomes: behaviours, enablers, understanding, skills and attitudes, and beliefs. These outcomes are deemed beneficial in planning for a successful transition. For the schools that participated in this DCSF project, which was a part of the National Strategies, the overall feel was positive in terms of strengthening transition (Hodgson 2008). In this project, collaboration and working partnerships were prominent. Also noticeable were sharing information and confidence-building, which enabled senior management teams at both primary and secondary schools to frame their thinking about the transition prior to developing a transition plan that best suited their school. In addition, this DCSF framework is comprehensive because it has pupils at its heart with the main focus on collaboration.

While the national strategy had a positive impression, it should be noted that not all strategies and policies imposed translate into effective practice. Some researchers have found that schools are under inordinate achievement pressure to the extent that they are sometimes unable to execute policies efficiently (Rudduck 1996; Galton 2003; Rice 2011). Information sent to some secondary schools from feeder primary schools is not always regarded as a priority. In the bureaucratic burden on heads and

teachers, actions such as filling in self-evaluation forms are also seen as a hindrance to effectively implementing some policies (DfE 2010).

Changes in education are inevitable and may arise because of a specific issue or problem within a particular context. However, for reforms to have their desired effect, they must become part of the political agenda, which suggests that legislation is necessary. For example, the Education Reform Act (Her Majesty's Stationary Office 1988) was designed to amend the law relating to education. However, when problems are translated into political issues, there is a need for interest groups to demand government action. Collectively, teachers have an influence on the political decision-making process, as noted by the Evidence Informed Policy in Education in Europe (EIPEE 2011; Gough, Tripney et al. 2011). The EIPEE identifies that the National Union of Teachers has a unique role and significance in impacting on the education and employment policies at national and local levels. The report indicates that the union has the purpose of ensuring that the contracts and concerns of all teachers and schools are amicably addressed by the central government.

In discussing the issue of school effectiveness, Whitty (2005) notes that there is little evidence that choice policies are fostering horizontal diversity in schools. Based on this observation, it appears that some policies serve only to reinforce the existing problems that the very policies were formulated to address. Still, the introduction of policies to address the issue of transition is a necessary intervention if the educational progress of pupils in transition is to make meaningful strides. Ball (1994) argued it is important to note that in spite of the fact that “policy texts are themselves political acts”, policies do not necessarily change power relations. This point underpins the need to think carefully about the ways and means of putting policy into practice without disadvantaging pupils and teachers. This study takes the view that schools should continue to formulate and implement transition programmes, although it is noted that

reforms do not appear to be able to “counter or outweigh” some of the other pressing issues that are affecting schools (Whitty, 2005, p.56).

Galton and Morrison (2000) suggest that an awareness of pupil perspectives is crucial, as it provides teachers and policymakers with an effective means to support the transition. Pupil perceptions are also important because parents and or teachers often perceive the transition differently.

3.4 Summary

This chapter has presented the theoretical frameworks that will guide the study in establishing its objectives. The notion of the transition theory and how it supports pupils as they move in, through and out of the transition process is still of interest to this and other studies. It also highlighted the importance of the 4S's, situation, self, support and strategy, and how each contributes to the transition experience. To support and understand the transition as pupils navigate throughout this process, this chapter has highlighted their perceptions and those of teaching staff by providing a discussion of the cognitive and social constructivism perspective. These theories help us to understand what is going on with the child and in turn there is evidence to indicate which part of the transition process they are engaging with. Finally, this chapter provides a bridge to the discussion of the analysis of the participants' experience of the transition, which discusses the moving in, through and out of the transition process.

Chapter 4 – Research Approach

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the overarching methodology used in this study and discusses its relevance in relation to data collection. The chapter begins with a personal reflection that considers my position and role in the Year 7 Project (Y7P) and is followed by the research approach as outlined by phenomenography. Using this approach, this research approach explores the understanding of a phenomenon, the transition to secondary schooling. Included in this chapter is a discussion of the research principles that underpin the study regarding the analysis of data and issues relating to reliability, validity and generalisability.

4.2 The Concept of Phenomenography

The study's analyses, as outlined in this thesis (Chapters 6 and 7), has been discussed and framed within the approach of Phenomenography which was first put forward by Ference Marton (1984) and a small research group of researchers from the University of Göteborg in Sweden. This section of the methodology chapters will introduce and provide a literature review of phenomenography.

Phenomenography, the methodological approach adopted in this thesis, offers an empirical study of the qualitatively different ways in which individuals (pupils in transition) experience, conceptualise, understand, perceive and experience a phenomenon (the transition process). The phenomenographic study is characterised by categories of description that are logically related to each other and form

hierarchies in relation to given criteria (Ashworth et al., 2000). An ordered set of categories of description is called the *outcome space* of the phenomenon and concepts in question. Although different kinds of data can be used, the dominant method for data collection for this thesis is the interview, which is carried out through dialogues.

Scholars undertaking phenomenographic studies assert that phenomenography assumes that the experience of a phenomenon is a significant influence in the development of a particular understanding of a phenomenon. Collier-Reed and Ake, (2013), in a functional view of the theoretical underpinnings of the study design, indicate that “the phenomenographic tradition is fond of providing leverage for a wide range of pedagogical innovation, whether specifically located in the context of the original research, reinterpreted in other contexts or simply generic in nature”. This study acknowledges the notion that participants’ experience a phenomenon differently and that this difference creates variation in their experiences. The key aspect of phenomenography as used here is the variation of the experience of a phenomenon, rather than the richness of individual experiences (Trigwell 2009).

To achieve the objective of phenomenographic studies, it is particularly important for the researcher to keep an open mind during the analysis and attempt to limit any predetermined views. Also, the researcher should not attempt to end the review process prematurely. Significantly, the researcher should be willing to constantly adjust his or her thinking through a reflection, discussion and exploration of emerging perspectives. Practising these skills during the analysis stage may be challenging. These skills are, however, paramount to maintaining a focus on the interview transcripts and the categories of description as a set, rather than on individual transcripts and individual categories of description.

The aim of the interview as the main method of data collection in this study was to provide opportunities for the participants to reflect on their experiences and share those reflections with me, as discussed by Dall'Alba and Hasselgren (1996), who, critically analysing the conceptual underpinnings of the paradigm, indicate that its methodological difficulties can be solved through a constructionist revision of the research. During the process of analysis, I, as the researcher, read and re-read the interview transcripts, as suggested by Shirley Booth (1997), with respect to the body of empirical phenomenographic research and emerging trends of the participants' awareness. Consequently, I was able to identify categories that emerged during the interviews as a result of immersion in the data.

4.2.1 Origins of Phenomenography

Phenomenography as a research specialism was developed in the mid-1970s by the Department of Education, University of Göteborg, Sweden, during research on student learning (Pears 2007). The word *phenomenography*, coined in 1979, first appeared in a paper by Marton (1986) and owes much to the works of Marton (1997), Svensson (1997), Saljö (1997) and Dahlgren and Fallsberg (1991). This nascent research approach can legitimately be seen as an offshoot of phenomenology, which is grounded in a set of particular theories and methods that are shared only in part by phenomenography. For instance, phenomenography does not claim to study 'what is there' regarding conceptions of the world (Marton, 1986). The aim of the current study is to use this method to describe qualitatively different ways of experiencing various occurrences. Phenomenography is concerned with the second-order perspective, which is oriented towards the different ways in which people see the world around them.

A number of studies as highlighted above following the phenomenographic method of analysis have been conducted over the last twenty-five years. Some of these studies addressed the content of learning and investigated learner perceptions in various contact domains. An earlier study, by Johansson et al. (1985), considered student understanding of mechanics. Students were asked to explain the forces acting on a car that is steadily and speedily moving on a highway. The study identified that the students have distinct responses to this question and other similar ones. Other research, by Renstrom et al. (1990), was concerned with student understanding of the nature of matter. The study attempted to enlighten people with regard to how upper-level compulsory school students between 13 and 16 years comprehend matter. It was identified that the students pose different conceptions of matter in relation to their focus. The phenomenographic research method has also been applied to the study of phenomena outside educational contexts, such as to political power (Theman 1983), the views of scientific intuition (Marton 1994) and conceptions of death (Tamm 1995).

4.2.2 Assumptions and Criticisms of Phenomenography

Theoretical perspectives in qualitative research make assumptions about the nature of reality and its impact on validity and reliability. Phenomenography, however, does not make assumptions about the nature of reality or the nature of perceptions. The primary assumption of phenomenography is that perceptions are the product of interactions between humans and their experiences of their external world. An assumption that was extremely important to me and other phenomenographic researchers was that personal perceptions are accessible through different forms of actions, but particularly through language (Svensson, 1997). Verbal articulation, as a form of data, was chosen for this study because it provided opportunities for both the researcher and participant to come to some understanding of the phenomena

being questioned. Verbal articulation also allowed for the elaboration of various points raised during the interview.

One criticism of phenomenography is its tendency to equate the actual experiences of participants to their accounts of those experiences. Saljö (1997) reported that, at times, there appear to be discrepancies between what researchers observe of participant experiences relating to a particular phenomenon, and how the participants describe their experience of the phenomenon. This description of the transition to secondary schooling was particularly noticeable with pupils participating in this study, as well as in those studies reported in the literature review in Chapters 2 and 3. For example, some studies suggested that most pupils find teachers in secondary school less friendly, which affected their settling-in process (O'Brien 2001). However, the project-group pupils in this study found that their teachers were not only friendly but helpful, which could have been because they were taught by the same teacher for most of their lessons, as they had been in their respective primary schools.

In order to avoid equating experiences with accounts of experiences, Saljö (1997) suggests that phenomenographers refer to studying different accounting practices of phenomena by individuals, namely, those that are public and accessible instead of referring to studying experiences by individuals. Such accounting practices may be socially and environmentally influenced, that is, the participant might say what he or she thinks the interviewer wants to hear, or reiterate what was said by his or her peers. It may be true that the accounts of the experiences of a particular phenomenon are not equivalent to the ways in which the phenomenon was experienced. However, the only way researchers can begin to understand the ways in which people experience a given phenomenon is to ask each person to describe the experience. Researchers can make observations of people experiencing a particular phenomenon, but those observations will not reveal exactly how those people experienced that particular

phenomenon. This is especially true if researchers accept the idea that perceptions, or ways of experiencing, are products of an interaction between the person and the phenomenon experienced. Therefore, in this study, it is argued that a level of clarity is reached through the analysis, which furthers not only the understanding of pupil experiences of transition, but also the means by which pupils experience transition. This clarity will also determine whether the Y7P was successful in accomplishing its aims and objectives.

Another criticism of phenomenography is its assumption that researchers can be 'neutral foils' while interviewing and analysing data (Säljö, 1997). It is more reasonable to assume that researchers have had certain experiences and hold particular theoretical beliefs that will influence their data analysis and categorisation. Webb (1997) has called for researchers to make their backgrounds and beliefs explicit, not because having these backgrounds and beliefs is detrimental, but because the readers and users of phenomenographic research need to be informed about all variables that can potentially affect the results of the study.

While a number of researchers highlight the strengths of phenomenography when used in qualitative research, there are caveats. For instance, Dall'Alba and Hasselgren (1996) asserted that a weakness of many phenomenographic studies has been their failure to illuminate clearly how they derive their perceptions. They added that it is insufficient simply to transcribe interviews, to read and re-read them, and then to assume the existence of emerging categories of descriptions and perceptions. In addition, they pointed out that, researchers need to provide a detailed account of the process of gathering and analysing data. This process should start by clarifying the possible considerations behind the framing of the interview questions and reflecting on the meanings attributed to the transcribed text. In this manner, researchers must

take into account how their perceptions take form as they create the interview protocols, questions and transcripts.

4.3 Qualitative methodologies and comparison with others

It is important for researchers to select the most appropriate methods and perspectives for their research topic. This requires an awareness of other practical approaches that are increasingly used in the social sciences namely, the big three, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism and phenomenology. The aim of this section is not to give in-depth details of these growing approaches, but to note the existence of evolving approaches within qualitative inquiry and to position phenomenography as part of this debate as well as to establish its validity and reliability in educational research.

Miles and Huberman (1994) evaluate the significance of a research study based on its ability to fulfil its objectivity, reliability, validity and utilisation. It is generally agreed among researchers that the social world is best understood from the perspective of the individuals who are part of the ongoing research. The multi-faceted nature of the qualitative research paradigm is characterised by a range of factors (Cohen 2000).

Creswell et al. (2007) designates qualitative research as “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting” . To build a holistic picture, the researcher must become involved in the social world that he or she is investigating. This involvement demands a focus on ‘processes rather than measurable end-products’ and utilises interpretive methods, rather than ‘statistical procedures’ (Denscombe 2010). In other words, qualitative approaches

are based on a philosophy of interpretivism. When informants and researchers bring their own stories or experiences as part of the research, however, the issue of objectivity is raised.

Those who detract from qualitative research view researcher subjectivity and lack of neutrality as disadvantages of the entire research process (Cohen 2011). Their critique and one that is supported by this thesis is not concerned with the manner in which individuals interpret the situations in which they find themselves and how it is reported. It is wholly representative of the participants being able or confident enough to reflect, recall and share experiences. Detractors argue that the subjective experience is not sufficient to explain reality, and therefore, a quantitative aspect should be introduced to provide more meaning (Cohen 2000). The main contention of critics is that subjective reports are, at times, ambiguous and partial, since participants give their own views of particular situations. This positivist standpoint suggests that there are no grounds for subjectivity in research, however while this position is important this research stands by the premise that the participants are the most valuable players here, and their experiences and perceptions of the Year 7 project cannot be capture quantitatively. It lacks voice and the human touch.

However, in saying this, the researcher is an integral part of the research process, and as such, is entitled to have views on a given matter (Bourdieu 1993). Besides, subjectivity is central to research since, in analysing social science issues, researchers should not ignore personal experiences and related theoretical positions. In an analysis of Consequences for Identity and Practice in research, Kleinman (1994) and Sarantakos (2013) indicate that observation of participants throughout the research study should be considered more than exclusive reliance on interviews.

The investigative characteristics of this research into school transition fit well with the spirit of qualitative research as argued by Bourdieu (1993), Kleinman (1994) and Creswell (2007), even though it refutes Kleinman's (1994) and Sarantakos' (2013) studies that argue that one cannot only rely on interviews. Phenomenographers support the notion of one method of analysis to understand participants' perception of engaging with a phenomenon and how their perceptions change over time. I, as the researcher here, argue that qualitative enquirers have a responsibility of demonstrating that their studies are valid and reliable and robust enough to withstand rigour. Moreover, the nature of the study and the personal information that I, as the researcher, was seeking greatly influenced the decision to use this approach. A qualitative design is suited for research when the researcher is "an active learner who tells the story from the participants' view" (p.19). This suggests that, in order to fully understand the factors that increase the likelihood of transition success, a qualitative design is required (Creswell et al., 2000). It is this approach that allowed me, the researcher, to make sense of the transition experiences of Year 7 pupils. Within the qualitative research framework, the mode of inquiry chosen to conduct the study was phenomenography in order to explore participant perceptions during the transition to secondary schooling and how and why their perceptions changed over time.

In this study, my position is that inquiry into pupil and teaching staff perceptions of transition in the Y7P requires qualitative methods that allow them to fully articulate their lived experience. Qualitative methods have been used successfully in a U.S. study of eighth-grade students that was conducted to determine the experience of adolescents as they transition from middle school into high school. The researchers, Mizelle and Irvin (2000), concluded that this cohort was both excited and concerned about the move from middle to senior high school. They reported that the students were looking forward to greater freedom, more choices, new extra-curricular activities and making new friends. Yet the students also admitted to feelings of fear and were

nervous about bullying, getting lost, more challenging work and the possibility of achieving lower marks than in the previous grade.

These qualitative findings were echoed in the UK by Zeedyk et al., who reported the perceptions of parents, pupils and teachers in relation to the move from primary to secondary schooling. Zeedyk et al. (2003) identified that the transition process poses significant challenges to students. The results of the study identified that bullying, fears of getting lost, increased workload and peer relations were the major concerns and challenges affecting the transition of these students. Similar to the research by Mizelle and Irvin, this study also found that pupils look forward to new friends, new subjects, new routines, extra-curricular activities, learning challenges and being grown up.

Similar thinking was reported and captured from a solely qualitative perspective by Kennedy and Cox (2008) in New Zealand, who produced a comprehensive and generic exploration of the transition experiences of children and focused on one child in particular, 'Emily'. Their final report provides a thorough and useful insight into what happened to students during the transition to secondary schooling. The key findings concluded that primary-to-secondary-school transition (Years 8-9) is not the disaster often referred to. They added that most children quickly adapt to the changes inherent with the move to secondary schooling. These changes include adaptation or adjustment to the new environment, finding their way around, moving to classes and becoming familiar with the different rules and routine (Kennedy 2008). In their research, they posited that the transition did not represent significant changes and was not mostly upsetting. They argue that, while the transition to secondary schooling seems to be recognised as a one-time event by some researchers, it should be regarded as a process that requires students to make adjustments over time. It is on this premise that the current study sets itself apart from other research projects. It

considers participant perceptions of transition throughout the academic year and examines how their perceptions changed and why, as opposed to other projects that only examine certain stages of the transition process and mainly rely on participants' interviews of their experiences.

In considering the perspectives above and their validity to qualitative methodologies and how they relate to this study, there is still room to discuss ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism. These two methodologies take a second order approach to research but have less in phenomenography. Linguistic ethnomethodologists focus on the use of language and everyday conversations. They explore how individuals interact within their environments (Cohen et al., 2007).

Symbolic interactionism also differs from phenomenography in that this approach relies specifically on understanding the differences of the natural and external worlds of language, symbols and objects. The study of these worlds and their interactions has no place within the phenomenography in which Marton and Booth (1997, p.128) argues:

When we talk about 'a way of experiencing something' we usually do so in terms of individual awareness. When we talk about 'categories of descriptions', (i.e. dimensions of variation) we usually do so in terms of qualitatively different ways a phenomenon may appear to people of one kind or another.

One of the main comparison of phenomenography as an appropriate methodology is phenomenology. Phenomenography has much in common with phenomenology including a second order approach to research, bracketing out other ways of seeing the world and so taking individuals' accounts at face value (Cohen et al., 2007). From

a historical view, as argued by Svennson (1997), phenomenography was not developed from phenomenology. As illustrated in the table below there are several distinct differences between the two approaches (see Table 4.1).

| Phenomenography | | Phenomenology | |
|-----------------|--|---------------|---|
| 1. | The structure and meaning of a phenomenon as experienced can be found in pre-reflective and conceptual thought. | 1. | A division is claimed between pre-reflective experience and conceptual thought. |
| 2. | The aim is to describe variations in understanding from a perspective that views ways of experiencing phenomena as closed but not finite. | 2. | The aim is to clarify experiential foundations in the form of a single essence. |
| 3. | Emphasis is placed on collective meaning. | 3. | Emphasis is placed on individual experience. |
| 4. | A second-order perspective in which experience remains at the descriptive level of participant understanding and research is presented in a distinctive, empirical manner. | 4. | A first-order perspective. |
| 5. | Analysis leads to the identification of perceptions and outcome space. | 5. | Analysis leads to the entification of meaning units. |

Table 4.1 phenomenography vs. Phenomenology (Barnard et al., 1999)

As illustrated in Table 4.1, phenomenography differs from phenomenology because it considers only the second-order, or conceptual, thoughts of people. Furthermore, it attempts to aggregate modes of experience and forms of thought into a limited number of categories (Marton, 1988). This research approach begins from the perspective that people experience a phenomenon or situation in a number of distinctly different ways. Thus, the research pertains to the various means by which people experience phenomena. These are known as second-order perspectives. They differ from first-order perspectives in that they report events 'as they are' (Booth 1997; Richardson 1999).

As noted in Table 4.1, phenomenography emphasises collective experiences, while phenomenology focuses on individual experiences. This approach allows researchers

to use their experiences along with that gathered from the participants (Edwards 2011). In contrast to this perspective, phenomenographic researchers claim that phenomenography assumes that the experience of a phenomenon is a significant influence in the development of an understanding of the phenomenon. They also acknowledge that the experience of a phenomenon would not be the same for all participants and the researcher's position must be a 'neutral foil' (Marton, 1997). Trigwell (2000) argued that the recognition of the experience itself yields a limited number of internally related, hierarchical categories of descriptions of variation. It must be emphasised that describing the variations identified is not the same as describing the perception and account as argued by (Larsson. and Holmström 2007) (Larsson & Holstein, 2007). These varying studies have supported the qualitative perspective and the need to employ this method if we are to begin to understand what occurs during the transition process.

4.4 Principles Underpinning the Research Process

In this study, research is a method of exploring, knowing and understanding a perception. This section discusses the underpinning principles that guided this research, including its reliability, validity and generalisability. This research was a journey and an opportunity for me to create a greater understanding of the transition from primary to secondary schooling in one school in South East England, Erin Sinclair Secondary School (ESSS). For this thesis, the research product was just as important as the research process.

Therefore, to ensure that rigour and trustworthiness were implemented in this research, a sound ethical framework built on a number of research principles was embedded. Sarantakos (2012) concluded that *ethics* refers to a set of rules and standards used in research and in practice. In most cases, the term refers to ethical

issues and dilemmas that can arise in the course of the research. These issues need to be considered at the initial planning stage and continually addressed and reflected upon as the research proceeds. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) suggested that they are related to the ethical obligations the researcher has towards research participants in terms of interacting with them in a humane, non-exploitative way, while at the same time being mindful of the role of a researcher.

4.5 Reliability, validity and generalisability

Quality in research has three distinct features: reliability, validity and generalisability. First, reliability is concerned with whether another researcher, undertaking the same investigation and using the same instruments, could reasonably be expected to achieve the same results. The second measure of quality relates to the validity of all aspects of the research process, including consistency between researcher perceptions and judgement. Finally, generalisability, or transferability, is integral to the conclusions drawn from the research and the relation between the research and the external world (Pearson, 2004).

4.5.1 Reliability

From a qualitative perspective, reliability reflects the use of appropriate methodological procedures in order to ensure quality and consistency in data interpretations (Guba 1981; Kvale 1996). Many qualitative studies question how the adequacy or rigour of the studies can be determined. In truth, the adequacy of any inquiry is largely dependent on the adequacy of its components. In other words, it is difficult to talk about the validity or reliability of a study as a whole; therefore, this study will discuss the validity and reliability of the instruments, the appropriateness of the data analysis techniques and the connection between the data and the conclusion.

Kvale (1996) highlighted two forms of reliability check: coding and dialogical reliability checks. As part of the process of settling on themes in the present study, both coding and dialogic reliability checks were undertaken. The following steps were undertaken during the processes of coding and code verification in order to ensure a high degree of intersubjective agreement on the categories before the collected data were coded. First, I, as the researcher, carried out the categorisation. Second, a fellow researcher, acting as an independent verifier, sought to validate the categories. Approximately half of the categories were validated, in that the fellow researcher arrived at the same result. Of those validated, three quarters of the interpretations of the data and categories of description were the same. The third step involved reviewing discrepancies. Fellow researcher responses were re-examined, and finally, the independent verifier and I achieved consensus on the appropriate categories. In providing detailed and intersubjectively agreed categories, there is a reasonable assurance that the effective use of the data and analysis can be made by third parties. This verification process minimised the threat of coding invalidity and enhanced inter-coder reliability. In this study, low inference descriptors were phrased in precise terms, and the entire interview with each participant was audio-taped and transcribed in order to increase reliability.

In addition to the coding verification, a dialogic reliability check was undertaken by the same fellow- and independent researcher. This check took place after the coding verification process to ensure agreement between researchers. The process involved a discussion and mutual critique of both the data and the interpretive hypotheses reached by each researcher. These checks provided a means of balancing my perspective as the researcher. They also checked against the possibility of prejudiced subjectivity due to my involvement in the Y7P and the bias associated with interpreting

and presenting the data in a positive light. Finally, the checks aimed to enrich the analysis, thereby producing reliable analyses that informed the research.

4.5.2 Validity

Issues of validity, sometimes referred to as *credibility* in phenomenographic studies, were addressed by making the analysis as contextual as possible. *Validity* is the extent to which a study investigates what it aims to investigate or the degree to which the research findings reflect the phenomenon being studied (Franz et al., 1996). Rather than seeking meaning in discrete words, sentences or phrases, the analysis of the data collected for this study concentrated on the pool of information and the relationship between one response and other responses. Considerable attention was given to the procedure used to collect the data and produce the interpretive account. This entailed focusing on the experience of the participants and not allowing interviewer bias to restrict the extent or quality of the response. Pupil and teaching staff participants were encouraged to describe their understanding of the phenomenon of the transition to secondary schooling through examples and descriptions of their previous experiences. At all times, the needs and rights of the participants were given full consideration (Franz 1996).

There are three standard criteria for assessing validity, namely, the impact of the researcher on the setting, the values of the researcher and the truth status of participant accounts (Silverman 2017). The most practical way of achieving greater validity is to minimise bias. The pupils in this Y7P study had attended secondary school for a few weeks before the interviews commenced. Some participants, anticipating the purpose of the research, tried to alter their responses according to their interpretation of the 'right' answer. To counteract this occurrence, the pupils were asked to describe what they knew about the Y7P. The question allowed the

pupils to speak about the project and how it affected them in a general way. This question became the starting point for the interview.

The matter of validity in this study was addressed in four steps: involving participants in all phases of the research, checking transcripts and interpretations with participants, seeking peer comments on emerging findings and clarifying researcher biases and assumptions (Merriam 1998). Another form of validation particularly appropriate to the logic of qualitative research is participant validation, which involves sharing findings with those involved in the research, in this case, the Y7P pupils and staff. When participants verify findings, a case for greater validity can be argued. To verify the findings and analysis in this study, I gave the teaching staff a copy of their own transcripts and my preliminary findings a month after the interviews took place. This group of participants was given an opportunity to comment and suggest amendments. All the teaching staff members were content with the results and the manner in which their views were presented. They also commented positively on the insertion of some of the individual comments that were highlighted during the coding process.

Kvale (1996) argued that the aim of research is to provide useful knowledge, where *knowledge* is defined as the ability to perform effective actions. Therefore, research outcomes may be judged in terms of the insight they provide into determining more effective ways of operating in the world. The most practical validity check concerns the extent to which the research outcomes are seen as useful and meaningful to their intended audience. In this case, the audience was the Senior Management Team (SMT) at ESSS, pupils and other teachers and staff responsible for the transfer and transition from primary to secondary schooling. The SMT and teaching staff were given the opportunity to review the initial findings and a subsequent draft of the findings. The response received from them impacted on the final presentation of the

data, which were from two perspectives. The senior management staff members were interested in how the pupils' and teaching staff's perceptions of the transition to secondary schooling differed. Another form of validation used in this study was the cross-referencing of findings, first, between the pupil interview questions and the data generated from their perceptions; second, the teaching staff's interview responses; and finally, across data from both the pupils and teaching staff. In these instances, the aim was to capture participant opinions about how the Y7P had assisted the transition process and literacy learning of newly transferred pupils.

4.5.3 Generalisability

Generalisability is of concern in qualitative case studies and was certainly a concern in the present research. Some scholars have argued that it is difficult to transfer the findings from one setting to others, as phenomena and contexts are necessarily interdependent (Amaratunga and Baldry 2001). The most critical aspect of investigating one school or context is that it provides a limited basis for traditional 'scientific generalisation' (Yin 2003). While qualitative case study findings can be generalised to form theoretical propositions, they cannot be transferred to populations or universes in the sense of statistical generalisation. Thus, the aim of this study was not to infer global findings from a sample, but to understand the phenomenon of transfer and transition to secondary schooling and to articulate patterns and linkages of theoretical importance within that sample.

The aim of studying the Y7P was to produce an understanding of the phenomena investigated. More specifically, the aim was to improve the usefulness of the findings for other researchers in two ways. First, this study provides a description of the dimensions of participant experience so that third parties interested in the transition to secondary schooling have an information base to guide their judgement. Second,

it establishes the typicality of the case so that users can compare the perceptions of participants. This study will also be valuable as a preliminary inquiry for further investigations. It may be of use for hypothesis testing in future research by showing that an interpretation that is plausible in a particular case might, therefore, be plausible in other cases. The study can also provide insight into a group of events from which the population has been drawn.

4.6 Summary

This chapter has clarified that the basic principle of phenomenography is an assumption that people view aspects of the world around them in different ways and that it is the aim of phenomenographic research to recognise and make sense of these different viewpoints. This principle represents both the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of phenomenography. The chapter also addressed principles that underpinned this research, including reliability, validity and generalisability, related to the pupil and teaching staff perceptions of the Y7P and its aim. Chapter 5, which follows, discusses the methods used to plan, collect and analyse data collected from participants of the Y7P.

Chapter 5 – Methodology – Planning, Data Collection and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter details the methods of recording and analysing the data collected. The data used in this thesis were part of the Year 7 Project, designed to ease the process of transition from primary to secondary schooling. The chapter begins with an overview of the research context and sample, the research design, phases of the research process and its relation to phenomenography. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the role of the researcher and the ethical framework of the study.

5.2 The Research Context and Sampling

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, this research took place in South East England, in a secondary school that was progressive in its desire to raise the performance of pupils. The Senior Management Team (SMT) recognised a trend over the years that incoming Year 7 pupils were exhibiting low literacy levels and were often not adequately settling into their new secondary school environment. With this information, they (SMT) responded by providing additional and specific transition assistance for pupils by providing extra support in each class, implementing a base classroom that was used for four of their main subjects and increasing opportunities for literacy lessons by removing Modern Foreign Languages. The purpose of these changes was to assist pupils in the transition from primary school and to help raise their literacy to the national levels. However, as previously mentioned, this research is only concerned with the qualitative aspects of the transition with regard to the Y7P participant perceptions, thereby rendering literacy issues outside the focus of this thesis.

5.2.1 The Setting – Erin Sinclair Secondary School

The setting for this study was Erin Sinclair Secondary School (ESSS), the pseudonym for a secondary school in South East England. At the time of the study, the school had a population of approximately 1,200 pupils with an intake of mixed abilities. Approximately 70% of the pupil population spoke English as an additional language (EAL), and almost half of the intake was eligible for free school meals. The study at ESSS was concerned with the Year 7 cohort, a large number of which were EAL pupils. Reports from the feeder primary schools indicated that many pupils had not attained the national reading expectation (Level 4) in their Standard Assessment Task scores (SATs) by the end of Key Stage 2 (10 to 11 years). Consequently, these pupils were considered at risk of being unable to fully access the Key Stage 3 curriculum; therefore, they needed additional literacy support and regular opportunities to develop literacy skills.

The recent redevelopment of the local area had led to a change in the location of ESSS; the school was moved to state-of-the-art premises that facilitated a multi-media method of teaching. The head teacher emphasised that the relocation had provided the opportunity to re-mould the school, both in its physical design and organisational structure, and to create a new ethos among pupils and teachers. The head teacher also made reference to the advantages of the redevelopment and argued that ‘kids around this way have got the odds loaded against them, so they need all the help they can get, and this school’s given them an extra chance—it gives them a reason to be proud of the part of [an urban area of South East England] they come from’. Because of this situation, the SMT at ESSS sought initiatives to help pupils, especially those entering secondary schooling, by providing opportunities for them to succeed and to overcome obstacles and challenges.

5.2.2 Sampling

Marton and Booth (1998), when defining the appropriateness of the sample size for a phenomenographic study, argued that the study should be comprised of a smallish number of people chosen from a particular population. They recommended that the number of participants in a group be between 15 and 30 to best achieve the aims of a phenomenographic inquiry. Consequently, there were 32 pupils and 18 teaching staff as participants, including the head and deputy teacher. In planning the research presented in this thesis, I decided to investigate the perceptions and experiences of two groups of pupils and teaching staff members at the beginning and end of the Year 7 Project.

5.2.3 Participants

The first group of participants comprised pupils entering Year 7 at ESSS. They were divided into two subgroups: the project group (PG) and the comparison group (CG). At the beginning of the year, the project group consisted of four classes of students with a combined total of 99 pupils; each class had a class teacher, plus one teaching assistant, although sometimes there were two teaching assistants in each class, depending on pupil needs. The pupils assigned to the project group were identified as needing extra literacy support, based on their Key Stage 2 SATs results. The comparison group was subdivided into smaller groups, ranging between 5 and 10 pupils in each, to support literacy and numeracy. In contrast to the project group, while the comparison group also had four classes with a total of 87 pupils, their daily structure as expected in secondary schooling did not change. These pupils were identified as being able to access the curriculum, and, as is the norm in secondary schools, they had a specialist teacher for each subject.

In keeping with phenomenographic convention and sample size, only 32 pupils were selected to participate in the interviews. From the two groups (PG and CG) of pupils, four from each of the classes were chosen by their class teacher, following selection guidance from the deputy head teacher. The guidance stated that the selection should include one pupil from the upper and lower ability groups and two from the middle groups in each class. It was felt that this selection of pupils would allow a full range of perspectives (see Tables 5.1 and 5.2).

| Group | Pseudonyms of pupils interviewed |
|--------------|---|
| PG1 | Josh, Kerry, Sultan, Wency |
| PG2 | Paul, Laverne, Nikki, Sammie |
| PG3 | Ali, Tonia, Katy, Jayden |
| PG4 | Eric, Scott, Karly, Chris |

Table 5.1 pseudonyms of year 7 pupils interviewed from the project group (pg)

| Group | Pseudonyms of pupils interviewed |
|--------------|---|
| CG5 | Robert, Reese, Barry, Najma |
| CG6 | Rihanna, Micky, Nicole, Ray |
| CG7 | Bracken, Jackie, Jai, Aiden |
| CG8 | Belle, Monet, Ade, Mani |

Table 5.2 pseudonyms of year 7 pupils interviewed from the comparison group (cg)

The second group of participants comprised 16 teaching staff members and the deputy and head teachers, creating a total of 18. The teaching staff included teachers and members of the Special Educational Needs team, whose staff supported and worked with pupils on a daily basis. Table 4.3 shows the staff members working with the Y7P, comprising three ex-primary school teachers, five secondary school teachers, and eight special educational needs team members, namely, one special educational needs co-ordinator, one learning mentor and six teaching assistants. With the exception of the three ex-primary school teachers, all members of this group were familiar with the secondary-school curriculum and had been employed at ESSS prior to the start of the project.

| Name | Position | Primary or secondary teaching experience |
|----------|--------------------------|--|
| Fern | Head Teacher | Primary and secondary (History) |
| Holly | Deputy Head Teacher | Primary and secondary (Mathematics) |
| Caleb | Project-Group Teacher | Primary Year 6 |
| Nicole | Project-Group Teacher | Primary Year 6 |
| Lauren | Project-Group Teacher | Primary Year 5 |
| Verona | Project-Group Teacher | Secondary |
| Martha | Comparison-Group Teacher | Middle school |
| Rachel | Comparison-Group Teacher | Secondary |
| Lissa | Comparison-Group Teacher | Secondary |
| Toni | Comparison-Group Teacher | Secondary |
| Carrie | SEN Co-ordinator | Secondary |
| Zara | Teaching Assistant | Secondary |
| Ashleigh | Teaching Assistant | Secondary |
| Annie | Teaching Assistant | Secondary |
| Kristen | Teaching Assistant | Secondary |
| India | Teaching Assistant | Secondary |
| Ally | Teaching Assistant | Secondary |
| Gabby | Learning Mentor | Secondary |

Table 5.3 staff who participated in the y7p

5.3 Research Design

In designing the present study, as the researcher, I needed to choose a methodology that would facilitate a collection of data reflective of the experiences of the newly transferred pupils and project staff. Data collected using these humanistic methods are termed *qualitative*, as they involve the gathering of data through a process of observation, description, questioning, listening, analysis and interpretation, rather than the established, quantitative processes designed to construct concepts and measure variables (Tesch 1990). The research design of this study was a pre-post comparison case study, following the phenomenographic tradition. This methodology was chosen because it provides full descriptions that allow coherent meaning to evolve from the findings and support the evaluation process by highlighting the participant views and experiences of the Y7P (Boulton-Lewis 2003).

5.3.1 Research Phases and coding

This research set about exploring the experiences of participants in a pre-existing project. As mentioned, I was not part of the initial planning of the research design; however, in my role as a researcher, I extrapolated one aspect of the project that was of interest to me: the transition process from primary to secondary schooling. Therefore, I designed a study that adopted a qualitative view of pupil and teaching staff perceptions in order to build a rich picture around their transition experiences. The research adopted a qualitative approach and was characterised by two research phases during the transition year: the first phase, at the beginning of the transition year, and the second phase, at the end of the transition year. These phases enabled me to explore participant perceptions of the Y7P and any issues associated with the transition from primary to secondary schooling.

Phase one, from September to October, took place at the beginning of the transition year, and Phase two took place in June at the end of the transition year. A visual illustration of the design is shown in Table 5.4.

| Research phase | | Procedure | Product | Analysis |
|--|--|--|----------------------------------|---|
| Phase one – Beginning of transition year | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Part A Part B | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Semi-structured interviews with pupils at the beginning of the year (N=32) Semi-structured interviews with teaching staff at the beginning of the year (N=18) | Text data: interview transcripts | A phenomenographic approach using thematic analysis |
| Phase two – End of transition year | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Part A Part B | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Semi-structured interviews with pupils at the end of the year (N=32) Semi-structured interviews with teaching staff at the end of the year (N=18) | Text data: interview transcripts | A phenomenographic approach using thematic analysis |

Table 5.4 phases of research design

Both research phases pursued a qualitative exploration of the pupils' and teaching staff's transition experience as part of the Y7P. Each phase had two parts, A and B. Part A in Phases one and two refers to the pupil interviews, and Part B in Phases one and two refers to the teaching staff interviews. The design of each phase mirrored the other so that I could gain insight into participant perceptions of the transition to secondary schooling. However, the focus of each set of interviews was different in order to explore changes in perceptions and the reasons why the changes occurred.

Specifically, the pupils shared their views and concerns about making the move to secondary school and discussed their feelings about secondary schooling in general. The interviews with the teaching staff focused on their experiences in meeting the needs of the newly transferred pupils, the purpose of the Y7P and their role as active participants in the project. The pupil interviews focused on their current feelings and the changes in their perceptions of secondary schooling. The teaching staff interviews were also reflective, as they discussed the role of the Y7P and the pupils'

understandings and attitudes towards the project. They also shared their views on the design and future use of the project.

5.5.1.1 Procedure

Each of the pupil and teaching staff interviews followed the same format. At least one week before the interview, the participants were given an information sheet and interview schedule, including the introduction and overview of the purpose of the research. At the beginning of each interview, I reviewed the research plan with the participants and the focus that I wanted to explore. Then I received their consent to participate and be tape-recorded during the interview. It was important that I, as the researcher, address important details before commencing the interview, such as issues relating to confidentiality, anonymity and data storage and disposal at the end of research. Once the participants were at ease with the setting and purpose, the interviews took place according to the semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendices 2 and 3 for the interview format). A more in-depth discussion regarding the procedure and analysis was provided in the preceding chapter.

5.5.1.2 The Focus of this Research

The focus of this research mirrors the perspective and outline for qualitative research methods promoted by (Tesch, 1990). The three proposed contexts for research within the social sciences are the conventional, directed or summative analysis, and they were employed to guide this study. To start with, in relation to the three contexts of research as proposed by Tesch, the study aims at investigating the perceptions of the participants as they shared their experiences of the transition process. The second aim is to explore trends in perceptions. Finally, the outcome is an understanding and comprehension of the meaning of the shared text. Since this research study seeks to

discover regularities as well as variations in perspectives, as per the model proposed by Tesch (1990), the appropriateness of phenomenography must be recognised, as discussed later in this chapter. Due to its ability to investigate discerned patterns in perceptions, phenomenography presents an appropriate methodology for this present study.

5.4 Semi-Structured Interviews with Y7P Participants

The aim of the semi-structured interviews in this study was to explore participant perceptions of the Y7P, the purpose of which was to provide approaches that would enable them to appropriately adapt to their new environments and eventually ease the transition between primary and secondary schools. Pupil interviews focused mainly on the transition process and support received during the transition period. The semi-structured interviews with the project staff had two foci: the transition process from primary to secondary schooling and the role of staff in supporting pupil learning within the context of the Y7P.

The semi-structured interviews with both the pupils and teaching staff were conducted face-to-face. However, the pupil interviews occurred in groups of four, whereas the teaching staff interviews were conducted individually. With this in mind, Fontana and Frey (1994) argued that, although group interviews may prove to be inexpensive and data-rich, they have the tendency to produce inhibited feelings and insecurity among some individuals. Therefore, it was imperative for me, as the researcher, to consider this perspective and to build a rapport with them before the interview took place, thereby making pupils more comfortable with me and the interview process. I achieved this level of rapport over a period of four weeks by attending lessons,

working with the teachers and allowing the pupils to become accustomed to me and my purpose for being in the class.

For both groups of participants, pupils and teachers, the choice of semi-structured interviews and subsequent analysis followed the conventions of phenomenographic research. The interviews followed a deliberate sequence of questions that allowed a further clarification of responses and, if needed, probing questions to ensure a full understanding of the discussion. Semi-structured interviewing, like all procedures for collecting data, has advantages and disadvantages. One of the advantages of interviewing, as suggested by Holstein and Gubrium, is the identification of ambiguities or misunderstandings that arise during the interview; these can be corrected almost immediately through further investigation (1995). This method of interviewing, as discussed above, also leads to another strength of interviewing, which is the ability to follow up on ideas, probe the responses and investigate a possible trend of thought (Drever 1995). This particular strength was paramount in this study and for the use of phenomenography.

In addition, the semi-structured interviews enabled me to instantly make a written note of participant movements, feelings, expressions and posture, which would be impossible if the interview questions were in the form of mailed or online questionnaires. Interviewing the participants, both the teaching staff and pupils, via a semi-structured approach produced high-quality data. As the interviews were semi-structured, they offered increased reliability of the information gathered and ensured accurate coverage, flexibility and rapport with the participants, as well as an opportunity to explore areas of thought as they emerged in the discussion.

A disadvantage of interviewing, however, is that the interviewer is dependent on the willingness of the participant to report or recall accurately the phenomenon under discussion, in this case, the transition to secondary schooling (Pearson 2004). There is also the danger that participants will report what they think the interviewer wants to hear (Cohen, 2000). Despite these potential disadvantages, Gillham has argued that, when exploring and seeking to understand people's real-life experiences, interviews are needed to provide insight into each person's perceptions of being a part of the setting being investigated (Gillham 2001). The interview method is, therefore, appropriate for exploring the phenomena influencing the Y7P, and it provides opportunities to explore the pupils' and teachers' perceptions of the transition to secondary schooling.

For the group interviews with pupils, the questions were originally generated from a transition-to-secondary-school perception questionnaire administered during the pilot study (see Appendix 1). The questionnaire was an exploratory tool designed through a negotiation between the university staff and the ESSS Senior Management Team, reflecting the issues that the school sought to raise with the pupils. Additional questions were generated from studies on perception conducted by Youngman and Lunzer (1979). After a brief analysis of the piloted perception questionnaires, it became apparent that the pupil views were not captured fully and their perceptions of the transfer and transition process were inadequately represented due to limited responses. As a result, the option of interviews was seen to be more appropriate in exploring perceptions. In addition to pupils' perceptions, teaching staff perceptions were also added. At the time of this decision, this aspect had not been explored in the literature and would have been a contribution to knowledge in the field of Education.

The semi-structured interviews with the teaching staff, head and deputy head teachers explored the impact of the Y7P on pupil learning and the transition process

(see Appendix 3). The intention of these interviews was to determine how transition and learning were experienced among these pupils. The interviews also aimed to explore different phases of their transition to secondary schooling. The participants were consistently asked to provide sufficient reasons for their answers in order to allow me to explore the phenomenon from their perspectives in greater depth.

All interviews, both with the project staff and pupils, were conducted in a small, comfortable and private room. The interviews lasted for approximately 20 to 30 minutes. The participants provided different reactions and views regarding the complexity of the Y7P. The teaching staff, however, tended to focus more specifically on their own roles and what they observed on a daily basis. In addition, although I, as the researcher, had a prepared interview schedule, all of the participants elaborated on the parts of the Y7P that were most interesting to them. This method of inquiry not only provided Y7P with perspectives of the pupils, teachers and support team, as well as the head and deputy head teacher, but additionally, it embraced their views on social and behavioural problems. Indeed, the participants were even given the scope to discuss other aspects of the project and possible ways of improving the Y7P for implementation the following academic year.

The pupils from both the project and comparison groups were asked to provide instances of their experiences in the transition from primary to secondary schooling. They were also asked to provide examples of how they thought the Y7P had affected other pupils in the same year. The interview process was intended to explore perceptions, rather than garner a generic response. Therefore, the interviews keenly focused on exploring responses from personal experiences and beliefs, rather than from popular responses generated by prior conversations and assumptions. This tight focus aimed to provide meaningful data for analysis.

5.5 Participant Voices in Research

The focus of this thesis is to analyse the emerging perceptions of participants having engaged with the Y7P and to discover how their thinking changed during the year. It has been established that periods of transition are often stressful to pupils and teachers, particularly in the early stage of the transition process, exerting negative effects on psychological adjustment and well-being (Zeedyk et al., 2003). To put participation in perspective, mainly for pupils, the Children Act 1989 established the right of the child to be listened to, and it promoted the collaborative notion of social agencies working in partnership with parents (Lloyd-Smith 2000). Listening to children was promoted by Lansdown (1994), who asserted that there is no culture of listening to children in England. Roberts argued that listening to children had a longer history than hearing and taking full account of statements made by children in their interviews. Roberts (2008) also suggested that, although more listening does not automatically mean more hearing, listening is crucial because it means that adults recognise and respect the worth of children as human beings. Davie and Galloway (1996) and Lloyd and Tarr (2000) for example, point out the practical benefits of giving pupils opportunities to express their opinions on education. These researchers argued that, by doing so, a desirable model of cooperative working could lead to a sense of pupil ownership regarding the activities that transpire in school. From a sociological point of view, Lloyd and Tarr (2000) have offered the following argument that the practical justification for giving children a voice in educational policy making, in monitoring and quality assurance, as well as in research, is epistemological. The reality experienced by children and young people in educational settings cannot be fully comprehended by inference and assumption. The meanings they attach to their experiences are not necessarily the meanings that their teachers or parents would

ascribe; the subcultures that children inhabit in classrooms and schools are not always visible or accessible to adults (Lloyd & Tarr, 2002).

More recently, researchers have shown the benefits of allowing children to participate in research when they are situated in their own space (Towns 2011). Until the 1980s, the voices of participants in qualitative research were not given a prominent position. Positivist research depicted an authorial, all-knowing and male voice that paid no attention to 'voicing' researcher identity and the assumptions that were brought to and shaped the work (Lincoln 2011). Currently, in the social sciences, personal and ethical issues that relate directly to research projects, as well as the experiences of participants, are considered crucial elements in the research process. Now, researchers are required to demonstrate both ethical and transparent practices. In particular, the voice is now given a presentation. Fabian (2008), for instance, argued that qualitative researchers need to understand the reality of voice as a process of the lived creation of meaning. From this perspective, paying attention to voice is not merely a vague ethical gesture or an attempt to understand participant opinions or perspectives.

To give participants a voice, however, requires addressing all the characteristics and related conflicts that accompany the process. Butler-Kisber (2010) noted that this action requires "vigilant and ethical attention to power and appropriation while attending to ownership, advocacy and the protection of participants on the inquiry continuum". There is a link between listening, hearing what is said and participation or sharing in research. Hart (1992) explained participation as "the process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the lives of the community in which one lives". If participation affects lives, then the action should not be perfunctory, but deliberate and decisive. Osler and Starkey (2000) shared this opinion when asserting that children should have "structured opportunities for exercising their participatory rights

as a fundamental part of a well-disciplined school". A similar view was expressed by Hart (1992, p.12), who posited that "programmes should be designed which maximise the opportunity for any child to choose to participate at the highest level of his ability". These two positions suggest that children should be permitted to share their views on school-related issues.

Wilson (2000) argued that participation can be classified into two main categories, superficial, or tokenistic, and 'deep' participation, or 'democratic play'. Deep participation, according to Wilson, is an umbrella term, encompassing participation that is 'active', 'authentic' and 'meaningful'. Deep participation means that young people are able to experience elements of citizenship and democracy in their everyday lives, in real and holistic situations, with meaningful outcomes or actions. To effect deep participation, the author suggests that the action be incorporated into the action plans of policy-makers, curriculum developers and education officials.

The above initiatives are concerned, directly or indirectly, with the participation of children in research. Legislative amendments have also brought about changes and introduced a Children's Commissioner for England, who is responsible for promoting the views and interests of children within and outside Parliament (Baldock 2005). Governmental commitment to listening to the views of children has been evident in the national consultations with children, feeding into the Green Paper "Every Child Matters" and subsequent legislation (Department for Education and Skills DfES 2005).

The problems identified in making participation a reality and the numerous associated hurdles are daunting to researchers who aim to make changes through these studies. There are many examples of creative and collaborative partnerships between adults

and children, which serve as an inspiring counterbalance. However, the increasing involvement of children in research raises a variety of ethical considerations. Researchers must demonstrate respect for children, upholding their dignity as human beings in the same way as they should for adult participants. Children usually want to please adults; thus, their ability to choose to refrain or withdraw from activities with an adult is usually limited. This area of interest is too extensive to explore in the context of this work, but for a thorough examination of the issues related to conducting ethical research with children, Farrell (2005) provides some fundamental ethical measures to be observed when conducting a research with children. She indicates that it is important to consider the ethical complications of engaging with children in a research project.

Munton et al. (2002) raise concerns about the status of children recognised as active and social agents; they argue that these children should be regarded as service users and stakeholders in their own right. The involvement and input of children should help to make services more effective in meeting their needs, compared to previous years, when they were viewed as passive dependents whose parents accessed services on their behalf. It is important that sight should not be lost of the real purpose of participation: children are stakeholders in any setting that they attend and any service that they access. Leverette (2008) drew attention to the danger of participation as an end in itself, rather than as a means to an end. Participation as an end in itself is exemplified by situations in which adults participate with children and demonstrate that they are doing so in order to meet their own agendas rather than through a genuine desire to hear and act on the views of children.

Handley (2009) claimed that the views of children are less likely to be given consideration when they are at odds with those of their adult carers; this claim serves as a timely reminder that being prepared not simply to listen, but to actively hear, is

fundamental to good practice. While this background discussion on participation has focused mainly on pupils in general and how their views should be respected, the current research is underpinned by respect for the views of pupils. This does not mean that the perceptions of the teaching staff are less valuable. In most research on the transition to secondary schooling, teacher perceptions are captured during interviews, with pupil perceptions also represented by teachers (Lloyd-Smith et al., 2000). To capture the view of both groups of participants, a phenomenographic approach was employed in the current study to explore how their perceptions of transition have been experienced and how and why these perceptions changed over time.

5.6 Phenomenographic Analysis

This section outlines the way in which the results of qualitative research are judged. The method of qualitative analysis used for this study, as with other phenomenographic studies, began with a search for meaning, or a variation in meaning, across interview transcripts. The data were also searched for structural relationships between meanings. Although the majority of phenomenographic researchers agree that the constitution of meaning and structure are combined, this study emphasised the importance of not prioritising the search for structure too early in the analytical process. One of the potential dangers of imposing structure prematurely is that it may lead to a lack of appreciation of the aspects of meaning to be found in the data (Trigwell, 2000).

5.6.1 Relation to Phenomenography

As with all other phases of the phenomenographic research process, the analysis of data should be driven by the main aim of the study (Renström 1990). Bruce (1994) suggests that data analysed in a phenomenographic study continue the process of

exploring the subject-object relations begun with data gathering. Accordingly, the analyses should uncover various concepts to be represented in the form of categories of description. As the researcher in this study, I will present not only the outcome space representing the phenomenon under investigation, but also descriptions of the various perceptions discovered within the outcome space. To facilitate the successful generation of outcomes, the entire analytical procedure will be guided by the research aim of uncovering variations in perceptions of the phenomenon being investigated, namely, the transition to secondary schooling. This research was undertaken to identify the different ways in which the newly transferred pupils and teaching staff experienced the transition initiative implemented by the Year 7 Project.

The data analysis began with a clear picture of the object of the research, and this picture remained in focus throughout the entire process. Furthermore, it was vital that the analysis continued to dwell on participant experiences. Ashworth and Lucas (2000) reinforce this point when warning that, although generalisations across individuals are of value, it is important that the individual's unique experience should not be lost. Undertaking this level of scrutiny requires a close mechanical analysis of the data.

5.6.2 Mechanical Analysis of the Data

The most challenging aspect of phenomenographic research is the mechanical analysis of the data, the process of which is threefold. First, meaningful segments of data are identified. Second, these segments of data are organised into categories of description. Third, the construction of an outcome space that describes the relationship between these categories is produced. Phenomenographic research generates a large amount of raw data, usually in the form of text. After a first reading of the transcripts in this study, a conscious decision was taken to analyse the data

manually in order to keep as close to the data as possible. Frequent and deep immersion in the reading and re-reading of these transcripts proved invaluable in the final settling of uncovered perceptions. This hands-on approach, as modelled by Sandberg (1996), allowed me to feel close to the data and the participants, which could be viewed as an important quality in the search for perceptions. Six steps constituted the actual mechanical analysis (see Table 5.5).

| Steps of mechanical analysis | Action taken |
|------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Transcripts were read and re-read until a clear understanding of what each participant was saying emerged. |
| 2 | During the third or fourth reading, 'slabs' of text with a similar theme were highlighted using coloured pens. |
| 3 | Once all the transcripts were read, the highlighted sections were cut and pasted to create separate documents, each representing an emerging perception. This step also facilitated the exploration of variations in participant responses or perceptions. |
| 4 | The new documents were read in their entirety to gain a 'feel' for the shared understandings of the pupils and teaching staff. During sorting and analysing, characteristics were sought that clarified perceptions of the phenomenon and also the significant structural differences that allowed relationships among the categories of description to be specified. |
| 5 | Once I was satisfied that participant experiences were faithfully interpreted, an appropriate label was allocated to each perception, and a new document was drafted. These labels became the recognised perceptions, and the associated text then provided quotations that represented each perception. |
| 6 | From this stage forward, individual transcripts were no longer a part of the analytic process. Instead, the new document containing data representing each perception was used as a point of reference, thus creating the 'pool' of data that is the basis of phenomenographic research. |

Table 5.5 the six steps of mechanical analysis

Through this six-step analytical process involving skilled perception and artful transformation by the researcher was implemented to understand participant's perception of the Year 7 Project. Table 5.5, illustrates how the analytic process was implemented. Three participant interview excerpts are used to explain how the

perceptual analysis of data was undertaken in this study. I used colour-coding to reference the themes identified in the verbatim excerpts taken from three teaching staff interviews at the beginning of the school year.

Each participant interview was audio-taped, transcribed verbatim and analysed following the principles of phenomenographic inquiry. The 90 pages of pupil and teaching staff transcripts were coded based on emergent themes and categories. Reading through the transcripts in the early stages produced a high degree of openness to possible meanings, whereas subsequent readings became more focused on particular aspects or criteria, but still within a framework of openness to new interpretations. The ultimate aim was to illuminate the whole transcript by focusing on different perspectives at different times. An analysis of the excerpts led to the identification of the concepts and categories of the description, which were exemplified and delimited through carefully chosen extracts to bring out the full range and meaning of each category. The transcripts were read and re-read until there was a clear understanding of each participant viewpoint.

Transcript re-readings facilitated the identification of sets of general themes, illustrating key aspects of the variation within the set of transcripts as a whole. The transcripts were then reviewed according to the designated themes and categories of description. Table 5.6 highlights the themes using colour-coding. Once the themes were coded, my attention shifted from individual participants to the meanings embedded in the themes, regardless of whether these meanings originated from the same individuals. Thus, the interviews were handled as a whole to extract a pool of meanings and re-read repeatedly. Table 5.6 provides an excerpt from the teaching staff as an exemplar of the process of categorisation. This method was also employed for the pupils' interview transcripts.

| |
|--|
| <p>Interviewer: What other support is in place for the pupils?</p> <p>Caleb: The other support is the special needs teacher, smaller groups, reading, counsellors and then there is a group who deals with non-attendance, sometimes they stay home because they don't want to be here or they may find it difficult to be at school. These pupils are taken out of the classroom and engage in activities. They do something fun like rock climbing or something.</p> <p>Excerpt 1: Caleb, class teacher (former primary school teacher)</p> |
| <p>Gabby: OK, as well as learning support teachers, there are learning support assistants, there are also people from various agencies that we are able to call on um with relevance to individual pupil's particular needs, for example somebody with visual impairments we may call somebody from outside to assist where necessary.</p> <p>Excerpt 2: Gabby, learning support teacher</p> |
| <p>India: Yeah, in terms of the Y7 apart from the four teachers there are two learning support teachers with each of them have a case load of 15 pupils who are on the code of practice and those two learning support teachers ah also manage three learning support assistants right so there are five staff in addition to the Y7 and their job is actually to work within the class or to have small groups of pupils where you are trying to meet their say literacy needs that are defined on the code of practice.</p> <p>Excerpt 3: India, class teacher and assistant head of Year 7</p> |

Table 5.6 sample of the coding process extracted from teaching staff interviews in this research

Once all the transcripts from both the pupils and teaching staff were read and highlighted to identify emerging themes, similar themes were highlighted in the same colour. In the case of similar themes, they were highlighted in two colours until the final categories emerged. The highlighted sections were cut and pasted to form separate documents, representing each emerging perception. The themes that emerged from the teaching excerpts cohered around the importance of special needs teachers, smaller groups, reading, fun activities, learning support and outside agencies. The forms of learning support, where mentioned, were initially coupled with special needs in the first round of settling on a category of description or determining the emerging categories.

For this research, the analyses were necessarily iterative, with concepts and categories evolving gradually as their meanings became clearer. While the categories of description were analytical, they were not used to label individuals. Rather, the categories allowed the similarities and differences between the

perceptions of pupils and teaching staff to be illustrated more precisely and uniformly. The study sought a better understanding of participants' perceptions by making comparisons between participant's thoughts in the early stages of the Y7P and at the end of the project. In practical terms, transcripts and selected quotations were grouped and re-grouped based on perceived similarities and differences and how they related to the transition to secondary schooling. Marton (1988) explains that, at times, groupings precede explicit descriptions of the similarities and differences, while at other times, the groupings are made according to tentative descriptions for categories as a checking and validation procedure.

The penultimate step in organising the categories allowed for a more detailed analysis of the initial grouping of themes. The purpose was to gain a better understanding of participant perceptions. After this level of analysis, the next move was towards determining categories of description. The naming of categories of perceptions at this stage was in accordance with best practices, which holds that researchers should not name perceptions until satisfied that the data have been sufficiently distilled to their core meaning and that the excerpts selected from the transcripts accurately reflect this meaning (Akerlind 2005) . Before the settling process of the Y7P categories of description could occur, however, all possible ways that the phenomenon of the transition to secondary schooling had been represented by participants needed to be explored. The final category of description is the settling process. This involved comparing significant statements in order to find cases of variation or agreement and categorising them accordingly. In this step, attention was paid to similarities and differences in the expressions and words highlighted in the excerpts. The fundamental concern here was to understand the meaning and support in place for pupils making the transition to secondary schooling.

After additional analysis, which involved reviewing the transcripts many more times, the decision was made to determine the wording of this perception as *support for pupils making the transition to secondary schooling*. This decision was made on the basis that the description of support by the teaching staff related to what they were able to provide for the pupils to facilitate learning. Reviewing these steps of analysis and categorisation provides a relevant example of an important aspect of phenomenographic analysis – the settling of a category of description. In this study, one category of description that emerged from the teaching staff excerpts (see Table 5.6) was *support for learning* (see Table 5.7).

| Category of description | Themes from interviews |
|-------------------------|---|
| Support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for settling in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Same class for the four core subjects (mathematics, English, science, and PSHE) • Support for learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Learning support ○ Learning assistant • Teaching strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Small groups ○ Additional reading sessions • Structure for Year 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teachers with primary school training ○ Focus on literacy learning |

Table 5.7 example of a category of description and themes within that category

It should be noted that the perceptions uncovered by this phenomenographic investigation were not necessarily those identified by all teaching staff participants. On the contrary, because phenomenographic data are pooled, a perception needed only to be identified by one member of the teaching staff, as in this example, for it to become an important aspect of the final outcome space. Indeed, the central focus of phenomenography is to identify all possible ways that a phenomenon is experienced by a selected group. To summarise, the analytic process exemplified highlights the importance of participant contribution to each of the categories of the description, which in turn, go on to create the outcome space. The shaded column represents the

teaching staff who contributed to this category during the interview. This allowed me, as the researcher, to track changes in the participant perceptions from the beginning to the end of the year.

| No. | Code | Name | Category A- Being well prepared | Category B- Settling in | Category C- Supporting learning | Category D- Transition success |
|--------------------|------|----------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | PG 1 | Caleb | X | X | X | X |
| 2 | PG2 | Nicole | X | X | | X |
| 3 | PG3 | Erin | | | X | X |
| 4 | PG4 | Verona | X | X | X | |
| 5 | CO1 | Martha | | | X | X |
| 6 | CO2 | Rachael | X | | X | |
| 7 | CO3 | Lissa | | | X | X |
| 8 | CO4 | Toni | | | X | X |
| 9 | SE1 | Carrie | | | | |
| 10 | CA1 | Zara | | | X | X |
| 11 | CA2 | Ashleigh | | X | | |
| 12 | CA3 | Annie | X | | X | X |
| 13 | CA4 | Kristen | | | | X |
| 14 | CA5 | India | | | X | X |
| 15 | CA6 | Ally | | | X | |
| 16 | LM1 | Gabby | | X | X | X |
| 17 | DP | Holly | | | | |
| 18 | H | Fern | | | | |
| Total responses | | | 5 | 4 | 14 | 11 |

Table 5.8 teaching staff contributions to the categories of description
(Note: PG represents teachers from the project group; CO represents teachers from the comparison group; SE represents the SEN co-ordinator; CA represents classroom assistants; LM represents the learning mentor; DP represents the deputy head teacher and H represents the head teacher)

The iterative nature of the phenomenographic analysis is an essential aspect of the analytic process undertaken in this study. The foregoing examples have attempted to illuminate the importance of naming and remaining close to the large pool of data

generated in phenomenographic investigations. It is argued that this active approach was the most appropriate for this study, as it enabled me to remain close to the data. The amount of data remained manageable, and the mechanical access enabled an ongoing analysis, leading to the identification of categories of description and themes. Tables below show the categories of description and themes generated from the analyses of pupil and teaching staff interviews.

| Categories of description | Themes |
|--|--|
| Preparedness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Myths |
| Holistic development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal development • Social development |
| Differences between primary and secondary school | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several teachers • The initial view of school size • New environment • Adjusting to change in status (oldest to youngest) |
| Interaction with secondary school | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discipline and rewards • Links between learning and teaching • Structure and detention |

Table 5.9 pupil perceptions of transition and the y7p (beginning of year)

| Categories of description | Themes |
|---------------------------|---|
| Preparedness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving to secondary school • The first day of secondary schooling • Choosing a secondary school |
| Holistic development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic development • Social development • Personal development |

Table 5.10 pupil perceptions of transition and the Y7P (end of year)

| Categories of description | Themes |
|---------------------------|---|
| Being well prepared | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving to secondary school • Design and organisation of Year 7 |
| Settling in | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupil ability • Social development • Support for setting into secondary school • Creating a familiar environment |

Table 5.11 teaching staff perceptions of transition and the Y7P (beginning of Year)

| Categories of description | Themes |
|---------------------------|--|
| Being well prepared | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation for a move to secondary school |
| Settling in | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of support • Pupil ability |

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for learning • Teaching strategies • Structure of Year 7 |
| Supports transition success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design of the Y7P • The long-term effect of Year 7 • Transmission of information to pupils • Support provided during the transition |

Table 5.12 teaching staff perceptions of transition and the Y7P (end of year)

The foregoing discussion has demonstrated the process used to analyse the data collected through interviews with pupils and teaching staff. The next section discusses how the data were verified for this research with reference to reliability, validity and generalisability. This will be followed by a discussion of ethical considerations.

5.7 The Dual Role of the Researcher

Finding oneself in a dual role during a research project can cause tension. For the purpose of this research, I found myself in a dual role, one of a researcher and a teacher who had experienced the preschool-to-primary-school transition process and understood the anxieties younger children faced during this process. In addition, as a former student, I, too, had experienced transition. Therefore, I had to address these positions during the research process. As a first-time project researcher, I found it challenging to define my role in differing circumstances. Colbourne and Sque (2004) argued that the tension felt in a dual role situation is a natural position, resulting from the commitment to gathering knowledge through research. This caused me, as the researcher, to keep an appropriate distance while in the classroom and encourage a professional relationship with the pupils.

During this research, I was aware of the danger of unintentionally bringing my perceptions of transition to this study. Therefore, during interviews, it was important

to remind myself that the interview was not about my perceptions, but about my role as a research instrument through which perceptual data could be collected.

There was also tension associated with my role of evaluating a new project to which the school was very committed. I needed to avoid all pressure to affirm the Year 7 Project in order to retain an independent and critical stance. Colbourne and Sque (2004) suggested that the researcher should keep the goal of the research in mind throughout. In my case, it was necessary to attain an understanding of perceptions at the beginning and end of the first year of the transition to secondary schooling and to determine possible reasons for the change in the participants' perceptions over time.

In addition, throughout the data collection process, I found it very interesting to consider the researcher-participant relationship in terms of what Colbourne and Sque referred to as the 'professional friend'. For me, this meant that I needed to be clear about my interaction with the pupils and teaching staff in a very new and different environment. I was also prepared, if necessary, to step out of my role as a researcher in order to provide or find the necessary support for the participants, especially pupils who may have needed safeguarding.

Another point of awareness in this research was the power imbalance. Russell and Kelly (2002) argued that researchers must be aware that power imbalances in research can favour the researcher more than the participants. Throughout the research process, the participants, especially the pupils, were seen as active and competent individuals who were capable of speaking for themselves and providing reliable information about their experiences regarding the transition to secondary schooling. This knowledge provided me, the researcher, with the assurance that the participants had the ability and confidence to participate in the research. This was

the first positive step in addressing the imbalance of power relations in the research.

In addition, Morrow and Richards (1996) argued that disparities in power and status between adults and pupils can present one of the biggest ethical challenges for researchers. It should be recognised that researchers always unwittingly have a distinct advantage despite their eagerness and willingness to, first, acknowledge possible power imbalances between themselves and participants and, second, explore ways to equalise power in the researcher-participant relationship. Mishna et al. (2004) argued further that a number of issues can offset this power imbalance. For instance, when the setting of the study is non-hierarchical, the imbalance of power can be lessened. Also, it is important to ensure that participants do not believe that non-participation can result in reprisal. Inattention to such matters can mean that the researcher is so suffused with status and power that they may be unaware of or unwilling to challenge.

With a view to minimising the power imbalance, it was imperative that I create a space in which the pupils and teaching staff could express themselves clearly. At every stage throughout the project, whether in the classroom, with a group of pupils or with the teaching staff, a number of important issues were explored. These issues related mainly to my role as a researcher and not as a teacher, and the purpose of the research was clearly articulated. In addition, the participants were reminded of matters such as confidentiality, consent and their rights. During these meetings with the participants, there were opportunities for clarification of the interview, and questions were encouraged about the process. It should also be noted that care was taken to ensure that all explorations, discussions and conversations were conducted in the spirit of partnership, which was characterised by honesty, openness and genuineness.

Throughout the research, I strived to put the participants at ease and ensure that they were comfortable. At every opportunity during the data collection process, I was vigilant in ensuring that the interview session was being conducted in a non-threatening manner. At all times, I valued the rights of the participants, accepted what they said and respected their limits, regardless of how much or how little they wanted to share. The strategies outlined were valuable to the research process, as they allowed and enabled the pupils and teaching staff to express themselves in a comfortable way. The strategies also minimised the possibility of the research process reinforcing the view of the participants, especially the pupils.

5.8 Ethical Considerations and Access to Findings

This research followed guidelines published by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) and particularly acknowledges the importance of showing respect for persons, knowledge, democratic values and the quality of educational research (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). With regard to this study, it should be noted that careful consideration was given to my role and that of the participants in what Christensen and Prout (2002) refer to as “ethical symmetry”. This was an important part of this research, as I held the responsibility for ensuring that the ethical relationship between myself and all the participants, both pupils and teaching staff, was the same, even though the pupils were regarded legally as children. This meant that respect towards the pupils was the same as that afforded to the adults. Likewise, the points of view and feelings expressed by the pupils were given as much credit and consideration as those of the teaching staff.

Once the nature of the project was clear, a research proposal was drafted and submitted to the Institute of Education (IOE) Ethics Committee for approval. After it

was approved and deemed ethically sound, the research began. I recognised that my presence in the school for two academic years infringed on the space of the pupils, teachers and other staff who were not a part of the project. Therefore, at the onset of the research, I informed those involved of my role and responsibilities. I then negotiated access to the teaching staff and pupils by drafting a research contract that outlined my responsibility to the school and my expectations from the teachers and pupils in return. This contract helped to secure the full involvement of the participants in the research (see Appendix 4). Parents were sent a letter at the beginning of the academic year, informing them that their child or children would be a part of the Y7P, which would involve testing and possibly interviewing them about transferring to secondary schooling. Parents had the option to refuse permission for their child or children to take part in the study. Fortunately for the project, all parents and guardians gave their consent, and none withdrew permission during the course of the research.

A brief presentation was given to the participating members of the staff, explaining the aims and procedure of the research. The research contract and consent forms clearly indicated that participant identities would be anonymous. Also, the staff members were assured that the names of the participants would not be used to report the findings and that the participants would not be identifiable in the final thesis. The staff members and pupils were informed that the research was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time.

This qualitative study was concerned with the personal views of participants, which made addressing ethical issues inescapable. Therefore, confidentiality and privacy were important ethical considerations in this study. All data collected in this study were kept confidential from the beginning. No individual was identified by his or her real name or description in this thesis.

Pseudonyms were used to refer to participants to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Personal information about the participants in the Y7P was protected through the use of coded numbering sheets and coded numbering data so that no person could be identified. Thus, the confidentiality of the responses was assured in all circumstances. Each interview was tape-recorded to ensure accuracy, and permission to record the interview was given from each participant before the interview started.

5.9 Summary

This chapter has provided a discussion of the methods of analysis selected for this research. After positioning the study within the qualitative research paradigm, an argument was made in favour of using phenomenography as an appropriate method for research, with the central aim of uncovering the different ways that a group of individuals perceives a specific phenomenon, as revealed through their voices and the method used to collect these data. Finally, this chapter highlighted the ethical considerations related to the pupil and teaching staff participation in the Year 7 Project to accomplish its aim. The next two chapters present the analysis of data collected from the pupils and teaching staff.

Chapter 6 – Data Presentation and Analysis: Pupil Voices

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the data collected regarding participant pupil perceptions of the Year 7 Project (Y7P) at the beginning and end of the school year at Erin Sinclair Secondary School (ESSS). The chapter focuses on the qualitative data collected during semi-structured interviews with 32 Year-7 pupils. The interview questions were informed by issues that were raised in a perception questionnaire used in the pilot study (see Appendix 1). Of the 32 pupils selected for the interviews, 16 were from the project group and 16 were from the comparison group. The themes that emerged from the interview discussions prompted the four descriptive categories that are subsequently analysed in this chapter using phenomenography method. Several of the themes that emerged from the interviews, which were later assigned to one of the four categories, mirror the themes discussed in the literature review (see Chapters 2 and 3).

6.2 Analysis of Interview Data

Drawing on phenomenographic methods, this chapter uses the themes obtained from its analysis as the basis for either supporting or rejecting the transfer and transition theories presented in the literature review (see Chapters 2 and 3). Some of the theories discussed in these chapters provide insight into how, over the last 40 or more years, the understanding of the transfer and transition process has affected pupils. Research in this area has challenged educationalists to rethink the manner in which pupils can be supported when making the transition from primary to secondary schools. In the last two decades, as discussed in the literature review, transfer and

transition studies have focused on various aspects, including the effects of a pupil's anxiety, change in school environment, curriculum continuity and psychological issues associated with the move from primary to secondary school. Some of these themes were also found in the data and will be discussed in this chapter.

This chapter presents extracts from interviews to illustrate and discuss the perceptions of transition as defined by pupils. The words of the participants are interwoven in a narrative that addresses ways of overcoming transition problems in Year 7 and, in some cases, the narrative includes quotations for the purpose of clarifying pupil views. Pupils are identified using pseudonyms, and I, as the researcher, am referred to as 'PB' throughout this chapter.

6.3 Pupil Perceptions of the Transition Process (Moving in)

This section discusses interview data regarding pupils' perceptions of their transition to secondary schooling at the beginning of the academic year after conducting a careful analysis, as outlined in Chapter Four. Two categories of descriptions were identified that bear resemblance to those of King-Rice (1997) and Youngman and Lunzer (1977). The first category, preparedness, identifies the need for pupils to be more prepared for their move to secondary school. This preparation goes beyond and is deeper than the notion of changing schools. It highlights the instability of a change in the environment, managing expectations, and adapting to new responsibilities. The second category, holistic development, discusses perceptions that support the notion that academic ability is not the sole determinant of a successful transition, as all areas of development, including academic, personal and social factors, play an important role in the process. Subsequent sections of this chapter elaborate upon the perceptions that are represented by the description of these categories. Both categories – preparedness and holistic development – are illustrated

by participant quotations regarding the themes that emerged. These quotes are representative of the participants' comments in general and are designed to describe and delimit the nature of a perception in order to make the variation between the perceptions apparent.

It should be noted that the number of statements illustrating a perception are not necessarily indicative of the number of participants that support the viewpoint. Rather than defining the perceptions, the interview excerpts illustrate and describe them according with phenomenographic research methods (Trigwell 2008).

| Category | Themes emerging at the beginning of the year that comprise this category | Number of participants contributing to one or more themes at the beginning of the year and percentage of total responses (N=32) |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| A (Preparedness) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils' expectations of secondary school • Choosing secondary school • First day of school • Missing primary school | 24 (75%) |
| B (Holistic development) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic self-image • Personal and social development | 20 (63%) |

Table 6.1 two categories of emergent perceptions of transition
(Source: Analysis of interview data gathered from Year 7 pupils at the beginning of the academic year)

Table 6.1 indicates that pupils were more concerned about the initial move to secondary school than about learning. Twenty-four of the pupils who were interviewed contributed to Category A, preparedness, which reflects the importance of being prepared for secondary school. However, 20 of the 32 pupil contributions recorded for Category B, holistic development, reflect on how they see themselves in their role and how they see themselves settling into the new environment.

The following discussion of Categories A and B provides an analysis of the findings obtained from the interviews. The discussion also details that, while some Year 7

participants had varying degrees of expectations regarding secondary schooling, others had few expectations and had given it little thought. This variation brought certain areas for discussion into focus, such as how pupils felt about themselves and the choices they had made regarding which secondary school to attend as well as the choices their parents or caregivers had made for them with regard to the secondary school selection.

6.3.1 Category A: Preparedness at the Beginning of Year 7

These perceptions focused on various issues that newly-transferred pupils encounter. The analysis of the category of preparedness begins with the examination of initial participant expectations and experiences regarding their transition to secondary schooling. The analysis goes on to examine the effectiveness of the early support that the Y7P offered for helping pupils settle into secondary schooling. It also explores the transition experiences of the pupils, assesses the extent to which they felt prepared for secondary schooling, and evaluates how they coped with the transfer. Of the 32 pupils interviewed, 26 contributed to the category of preparedness. For some, transitioning to secondary schooling was perceived as socially, emotionally and academically challenging. This category was formed from four subthemes that will be discussed in the subsequent sections. These themes are of the pupils' expectations, choosing a secondary school, the first day of secondary schooling and missing primary school.

6.3.1.i Pupil expectations of secondary school

Transferring from primary to secondary school can be a time of excitement, and many pupils perceive this as a step towards adulthood and an opportunity to make new friends or simply a new start. As indicated by the literature review Chapters 2 and 3,

a majority of the research on pupils transferring from primary to secondary school suggests that, during Year 6, pupils tend to go through a phase in which they feel impatient to leave their primary school in order to attend their new secondary school. There was also consensus in most pupil interviews regarding this issue; however, several pupils had mixed feelings about moving to secondary school. One of the first issues that emerged during the interviews regarded participants feeling somewhat worried just before leaving primary school. For example, Karly (from the project group), said the following:

I was happy I was growing up and could not wait to go secondary school, but I was really scared and did not know what to expect. I thought I was going to get bullied by the bigger children.

Hargreaves and Galton (2002) note that, prior to transferring to secondary school, pupils' excitement levels are high, and the one-day visit to secondary schools that is a part of many transfer programmes adds to their enthusiasm. However, as the time for transfer approaches, a number of pupils realise that they are leaving a site of comfort for one that presents social and educational challenges. For some, this can have a significant influence on their perspective towards secondary school, their studies and future self-esteem (Hargreaves & Galton, 2002).

The pupils reported that their unpreparedness for secondary school was mainly due to having heard numerous stories that became myths, having certain expectations, and lacking information about the school. When asked to elaborate on their expectations, the responses of the comparison- and project-group participants varied.

PB (interviewer): What did you expect from secondary school?

Reese (comparison group): I thought the work would be a lot harder, but it wasn't. It's easier than primary.

Monet (comparison group): I thought the teachers would all be mean, but they're all actually nicer than I thought.

Barry (comparison group): I heard from my brother that it's a good school and it's famous for sports, and I play footie. I'm really good.

While pupils from the project classes mentioned initially having mixed feelings about moving to secondary school, their focus was different from that of the pupils from the comparison groups. Their views and expectations centred more around the physical and social aspects of the new school than those of the pupils in the comparison group, whose responses revolved more around academic matters.

Wency (project group): I heard from my neighbour who attends this school that it's a big school and the Year 7s always get lost.

Josh (project group): I thought I'd have problems making friends, but it wasn't difficult to make friends.

As discussed earlier in the literature review, most pupils mentioned the numerous myths associated with transferring to secondary school. These myths had a tendency to fuel anxiety. Sammie (also from the project group) mentioned that the Year 7 pupils 'have their heads flushed down the toilet' and 'the first year's beating', and many had been worried about whether these notions were reality or only myths. More than 75% of the pupils from the project group reported in their beginning-of-year interview that they had heard negative things about secondary school.

PB (interviewer): What did you hear about secondary school?

Sammie (project group): All sorts.

PB: What do you mean, 'all sorts'?

Sammie: They said it was a good school, but things happen to new students. This is scary.

PB: What type of things?

Tonia (project group): Like the big children will bully you.

PB: So, did this happen?

Sammie, Tonia, Scott, and Chris (project group): No.

Eric (project group): Those things aren't true. They only say those things to scare you.

Karly (project group): But I heard it happened to a boy.

Sammie and Eric (project group): Not sure if I believe that.

The responses of the comparison group regarding the expectations of secondary school were significantly different. These pupils were more dismissive of the myths and did not dwell on them; rather, they concentrated mostly on their lessons, their teachers and learning a modern foreign language.

PB (interviewer): What did you hear about secondary school?

Rihanna (comparison group): I heard that the teachers are strict and expect a lot from you.

Jackie (comparison group): I heard that we'll learn German, and I was really looking forward to learning a new language.

Jai (comparison group): The work will be really hard, you have a lot of homework, and if you don't do it, then you get detention.

Interestingly, while the majority of comparison-group pupils expressed little trepidation

about secondary school at the beginning of the academic year, half of the project-group pupils interviewed reported feelings of being lost and unsettled. Pupils from the comparison group were more articulate when not only expressing their expectations, but also describing what actually happened. They were generally more positive, reporting that their transfer had been facilitated by visiting the new school, having family and friends who were attending or had attended the school and meeting some of the teachers before Year 7 began.

The pupils interviewed had clearly been through a variety of experiences during the early stages of their transition. When asked whether they had been worried about the transfer to secondary school while still at primary school, each of them admitted to having experienced some form of anxiety. Surprisingly, although the pupils in the comparison group had been more confident about their move to secondary school compared with the project-group pupils, they also reported having felt anxious about issues such as losing items and having their head flushed in the toilet. It is clear that, while the transfer and transition process produced mixed feelings, some pupils tended to cope better than others. In trying to gain a better understanding of the anxiety felt by pupils and deflect pressure from the participants, pupils were asked *What do you think most pupils feel when they transfer school?* One pupil from the comparison group, Barry, reported the following:

Transferring is really hard for some pupils. They only knew people from their old school, and now they're all in different classes. The pupils don't look happy, as they did at my old school. All of my friends are in different classes, and I had to make new friends. Making new friends is hard.

Most participants, when asked about the expectations they had before beginning at secondary school, reported having positive expectations. However, 16 pupils, eight from each group, admitted that their actual experience was somewhat different from their expectations; they felt unsettled in secondary school at the beginning of the year.

For example, Jai, from the comparison group, said, 'I thought the teachers were unfriendly, but they aren't.' Scott, a project-group pupil, said, 'I thought that the work would be difficult, but it's easy, like in primary school.'

Throughout the initial interviews with pupils from both the project and comparison groups, the participants agreed that the transition to secondary school had not been as bad as they had expected it to be. When asked to offer advice for incoming Year 7 pupils, they commented on the unnecessary worries and concerns and the importance of making friends, talking to teachers about their concerns and not listening to rumours. Monet, from one of the project classes, confirmed this, saying, 'All the rumours you hear about secondary school about flushing heads in the toilets, or you get beat up, are all false.' Tonia, from the project group, said, 'Don't be nervous. Just enjoy it. Try to make new friends, and things will settle down fast.'

7.1.1.i Choosing a secondary school

This section explores selecting a secondary school from the perspective of pupils. In most cases, in both this and other research that discusses school choice, fewer than half of the pupils participated in the decision-making process. The group interview allowed the pupils to explore their perceptions regarding school choice in greater detail, in terms of who made the choice, how the decision was made and how they felt about the final decision.

Overall, based on the information gathered from the interviews, the pupils were happy to share their perceptions regarding their school choice. It was interesting to note that the majority of pupil perceptions supported the view that it is the responsibility of the parents to make the decision. While they did not feel as though they had participated in the decision-making process, the pupils agreed that they supported the parental decisions. Most pupils reported that their parents had discussed various influences

in their decision-making, such as the school's distance from their home and attendance of the school by siblings, relatives and friends. Twenty-five of the 32 pupils reported that their parents had influenced their decision of which secondary school to attend. The remaining seven pupils reported that their parents had given them the opportunity for choosing which school they wanted to attend. However, three of these seven pupils said that their parents had offered them some guidance, but the final decision had been their own.

Fifteen of the 25 pupils whose parents had chosen their secondary school for them were from the project group, while 10 were from the comparison group. Of the seven pupils who had made the decision themselves, one belonged to the project group, while six were from the comparison group (see Table 6.2).

| | Project group | Comparison group | Total |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| Pupil made school choice | 1 | 6 | 7 |
| Parent made choice | 15 | 10 | 25 |
| Total | 16 | 16 | 32 |

Table 6.2 theme – secondary school choice

The group interviews permitted a more detailed exploration of the pupils' perspectives of school choice and why ESSS was one of their choices for secondary school. Although this study has not investigated parental perceptions, some pupils offered their views on the role their parents played in the selection of a secondary school. Pupils from both groups noted that, although their parents had made the final decision, the main selection criteria were proximity to home and current or past attendance by family members. Some pupils mentioned that, if they had attended the school of their choice, lengthy journeys would have been necessary. For instance, Belle, from the comparison group, said, 'I wanted to go to another school, but it was too far, and my mum wanted me to go to a school closer.' Other excerpts from the project-group

participants indicated the importance of the proximity from home to school and other factors that contributed to the choice of school.

Chris, Sammie, and Josh (project group): Because it was close. It was closer to my house.

Karly (project group): My sister and brother came to this school.

Nikki and Paul (project group): My mum came to this school when it was in the other building, and it is closer to my house.

Transcript excerpts from the comparison group also reflect that familial links influenced the decision made.

Reese (comparison group): My three sisters and my brother went here, and they said it was a good school.

Jai and Aiden (comparison group): I have a brother that goes to this school, so that meant I had to come here too.

In some cases, pupils drew on information obtained from family and friends in order to select what they called a 'good' school. When probing into what a 'good' school entailed, Josh, from the project group, said, 'A good school gives you everything, like sports and good teachers,' while Jai, from the comparison group, said, 'Yes, all that. But you are treated like an adult and not a child, and you have more clubs and activities to get involved with.' Other pupils mentioned the availability of particular subjects, sport facilities, and the standard of education in general. A further explanation of what is meant by a 'good' school was offered by Barry, a comparison-group pupil:

PB (interviewer): Before you came here, would you have heard anything about this school before?

Barry (comparison group): Yeah, my brother said that it was a good school.

PB: What do you think he meant by 'a good school'?

Barry (comparison group): I mean, nothing is wrong with it. Like the classes and teachers are all okay. I mean, the sports, too. Loads of people who went here and knew people who went here, and they said it was a good school.

In addition to stating whether their school choice was good, pupils were asked what ESSS had done to accommodate them on their first day of term and what impact that had on their settling into their new school environment.

7.1.1.ii First day at school

According to pupils from both groups, the first day was rather daunting, and they were really nervous. However, the adapted structure of the day made it easier and reduced anxiety. Jai, a comparison-group pupil, said, 'It felt special having one day to become familiar with the school before the other year groups returned to school.' Other pupils in the group interview agreed, claiming that it provided them with time to become familiar with the new school. For instance, Karly, a project-group pupil, added, 'We had an assembly and got to meet the head and deputy head teacher and a few other teachers as well.'

Another point that arose regarding the first day was that of the structure of classes and not being exposed to one teacher for each subject. As mentioned in Chapter 1, in connection with the design of the Y7P, the pupils who had low standard assessment task (SAT) results, along with weak literacy and reading scores, were assigned to one of four project-group classes. The adapted curriculum and lesson structure provided by the project classes were introduced to the pupils on their first day. According to the pupils, receiving this information added to the unsettled feeling of the first day at

secondary school. For example, Laverne, from the project group, a pupil who settled well, said that she had been 'looking forward to having one teacher for each subject and studying science, but was told that they would have one teacher for four subjects and six specialist teachers'. Even though the prospect of having separate subjects and numerous teachers had been a major concern for a majority of the pupils in the project group, most of their comments about the first day of secondary schooling were positive and forward-looking. This was despite the fact that some pupils were disappointed to receive news of the revised curriculum and lesson structure.

Sammie (project group): On the first day, I was a bit disappointed. We didn't have lockers, so this means we had to carry all our stuff around with us.

Karly, Nikki, Chris, and Paul (project group): They told us that we have to stay in one class for four subjects. I was disappointed, but it's okay now.

The comparison-group pupils unanimously reported that they had been keenly excited and were looking forward to the opportunities offered at secondary school.

Najma (comparison group): On the first day of school, it was really good. We didn't get homework, but they told us about the rules and gave us our timetables. It all seems like a lot, but it was good.

Jai (comparison group): I was very excited and really happy to be here. I like secondary school.

Sammie's response also brought into focus the perceptions of other pupils in the project group, who mentioned that the change in the structure of their day had caused some anxiety on their first day at secondary school. As outlined in Chapter 1, the project class was designed to have one teacher in the classroom for four subjects, with modern foreign languages being replaced by extra literacy lessons. Many pupils reported feeling that having one teacher for four subjects was too similar to primary

school. Others reported perceiving these changes as unexpected and finding it difficult to understand why they had occurred. For example, Ali, from the project group, said, 'Moving to secondary school is supposed to be about new subjects, like science and German or something, and having loads of new teachers'.

Further, those interviewed from the comparison group expressed more positive views in relation to academic subjects, such as an enjoyment of independence, responsibilities and their new subject lessons. As noted earlier, the pupils thought that their parents and teachers expected them to adjust to the new subjects and achieve higher goals. For some, this was exciting, while for others it was challenging.

During the analyses of the pupils' interviews, their accounts of their first day of school were found to be filled with information about the Y7P, the two groups of classes, rules and timetables. Once given this information and placed in their respective classes, the class teacher was seen as the main person who would help with the settling-in process. In discussing the settling-in process with the pupils, it was found that participants from the project and comparison groups placed emphasis on different aspects of settling into secondary school. Initially, those in the project group expressed anxiety about their new and much larger school environment and not having one teacher for each subject like the other Year 7 pupils did (see Chapter 1 for the design of the Year 7 Project). However, during the interview, they reported that having a main classroom as a base for four of their subjects aided the settling-in process in the new school environment. Indeed, one pupil from the project group, Eric, put this simply when saying, 'It wasn't difficult to find the room because you're here most of the time. We only have to remember a few other rooms, and they're not that far from our main room'.

This study suggests that the provision of a familiar classroom environment provided

pupils with the safety and security required to embrace the new school environment, reduce anxiety and help with the settling-in process during the first year of secondary school.

This study also found that whoever chose the secondary school, whether it was the parent, pupil or both, the most common selection criterion was whether older siblings or relatives were currently attending or had attended the school. This factor was borne out in the pupil interview data and will be highlighted in the analysis of the teaching staff questionnaires and interviews in Chapter 7.

7.1.1.iii Missing primary school

The final theme identified under the category of preparedness relates to the pupils' perceptions of missing their primary school and the factors associated with it. Although the Y7P design meant that the pupils from the project group would be exposed to an environment and teaching style that was similar to a primary classroom, some reported to still miss their primary school and to find making their way around the new school daunting. Some pupils also reported feeling that they had regressed in their academic ability and that the work at secondary school was really easy. This notion of curriculum continuity from primary to secondary schooling was discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2. The following excerpt highlights the feelings of some pupils from both groups related to missing their primary school and the associated loss of security.

PB (interviewer): What do you miss most about primary school?

Josh (project group): I miss my primary teacher. She was really nice.

Sultan (project group): My primary school was a lot smaller than this one, and I knew where everything was, but here, I can't find my way around yet.

Micky (comparison group): I miss being the oldest in the school. The

other children look up to you when you're older.

Barry (comparison group): I really miss my friends from primary school.

Some are here, but they're in different classes, so we hardly see each other.

Pupils from the project group shared their perceptions about missing primary school in terms of the physical environment and interactions with their teacher, whereas pupils from the comparison group focused more on the psychological, social and academic aspects of primary school. Interestingly, the pupils in both groups who had an older sibling at the secondary school were as likely as the others to report missing their primary school to a certain degree. Moreover, having made new friends in their new school had little influence over the overall extent to which both groups reported missing primary school. However, those with friends from primary school at their new school were less likely to report missing their old school.

Barry, from the comparison group, mentioned that he missed his friends because they were in different classes at ESSS. In speaking with pupils from both groups about missing primary school, I wanted to discover more about how they were feeling about making new friends. Thus, that point was revisited at the end of the interview. Mani, also from the comparison group, said, 'I knew everyone in primary school, but most of my friends are in another class, and I do not see them much.' In contradistinction, pupils from the project group of classes reported that they did not miss primary school as much as the pupils from the comparison group. One reason for this that was highlighted in this research was that, because the same pupils were in most of their classes, the project-group pupils were familiar with their classmates and made friends with everyone. For instance, Josh, from the project group, said, 'I miss my friends from primary school because some went to another school and some are in other classes here. But I have made new ones, so it's okay.' This demonstrates that at least one pupil in the Y7P classes experienced an element of transition success that

could impact on other areas, such as academic self-image and settling into secondary school. However, this does not mean that all pupils in the project groups shared these sentiments. Some pupils were still struggling during the first few weeks at secondary school.

Despite the differences in anxiety levels after transferring, most pupils reported their reliance on informal sources of information regarding the school they were to attend. Most reported that their siblings or relatives were their main sources of information regarding issues such as discipline, homework, teachers and acclimatisation. However, many also drew on information from sources outside their families, such as from friends and others already attending their future secondary school. Table 6.3 illustrates the pupil perceptions that contributed to the themes within Category A – preparedness.

| No. | Group | Name | Category A |
|-----------------------|-------|---------|------------|
| 1 | PG1 | Josh | X |
| 2 | PG1 | Kerry | X |
| 3 | PG1 | Sultan | X |
| 4 | PG1 | Wency | X |
| 5 | PG2 | Paul | |
| 6 | PG2 | Laverne | X |
| 7 | PG2 | Nikki | X |
| 8 | PG2 | Sammie | X |
| 9 | PG3 | Ali | |
| 10 | PG3 | Tonia | X |
| 11 | PG3 | Katy | X |
| 12 | PG3 | Jaiden | |
| 13 | PG4 | Eric | X |
| 14 | PG4 | Scott | X |
| 15 | PG4 | Karly | X |
| 16 | PG4 | Chris | X |
| Total response | | | 13 |

| No. | Group | Name | Category A |
|-----------------------|-------|---------|------------|
| 17 | CG5 | Robert | |
| 18 | CG5 | Reese | X |
| 19 | CG5 | Barry | X |
| 20 | CG5 | Najma | X |
| 21 | CG6 | Rihanna | X |
| 22 | CG6 | Micky | X |
| 23 | CG6 | Nicole | X |
| 24 | CG6 | Ray | |
| 25 | CG7 | Bracken | |
| 26 | CG7 | Jackie | X |
| 27 | CG7 | Jai | X |
| 28 | CG7 | Aiden | |
| 29 | CG8 | Belle | X |
| 30 | CG8 | Monet | X |
| 31 | CG8 | Ade | |
| 32 | CG8 | Mani | X |
| Total response | | | 11 |

Table 6.3 pupils' perceptions contributing to the themes within category A – preparedness
(Note: PG 1-16 represent project-group pupils; CG 17-32 represent comparison-group pupils)

Based on the interviews at the beginning of the year, Table 6.3 also displays the

pseudonyms of the pupils whose perceptions of preparedness for secondary school caused their comments to be placed in Category A. The table does not show the number or frequency of the pupil contributions, as phenomenography is not concerned with the number of participants who contributed, but how each participant perceived the phenomenon being investigated. A careful examination of the themes that emerged in this category revealed how pupils from both the project and comparison groups felt about being prepared for their secondary school. This evidence was gathered through a discussion about their first day, their expectations, school choice and missing primary school. However, numerous participants had settled in by the time of the interview. It seemed that, although pupils' perceptions were divided into two groups, there was evidence that all pupils shared a certain level of trepidation associated with transitioning to secondary schooling. While the analysis of pupils' expectations sheds light on the transition, other issues, such as academic, personal and social development in their new school environment, are just as important.

To summarise the category of preparedness, pupils raised issues relating to their experiences of the first day. Those pupils who reported feeling more settled in the early stages of the autumn term not only had siblings or friends from their primary school attending ESSS, but also had an idea of what to expect. Those who had older siblings enrolled in the school were less likely to report experiencing negative emotions on their first day.

6.4 Category B: Holistic Development (moving through the transition)

The focus of Category B is holistic development, which examines emergent pupil perceptions regarding academic self-image, in addition to personal and social factors arising from the move to secondary school. These two themes – academic self-image

and personal-social factors – arose in the initial phase of pupil interviews during the first few weeks of term and provided insight into how the pupils were feeling and coping with the transition. These areas were not the focus of the interviews, but they emerged when discussing how pupils felt prior to moving to their secondary school and during their first weeks attending secondary school.

Of the 32 pupils interviewed from both the project and comparison groups, 20 made one or more contributions to Category B. As mentioned earlier, some pupils did not contribute. However, this does not mean that they had no opinions; they simply did not offer their perceptions. Such comments could have been placed in either of the categories. For example, Reese contributed to the discussion that formed the themes of academic self-image and the social aspects of the transition to secondary school.

The holistic development category of perception comprised of 63% of the responses given during the interview and included themes such as pupil interactions with teachers, their feelings about old and new subjects and their perceptions of school in general. The pupils generally recognised that, although anxious about the transition to secondary schooling, they are whole beings. Further, they accepted the need to adjust to the workload and integrate into the new school environment.

6.4.1 Academic self-image

A number of studies, including those discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, have indicated the consequences of the transition to secondary schooling in terms of how pupils perceive themselves and their academic abilities. As with the previous themes discussed in Category A, *academic self-image* also emerged from the initial pupil interviews regarding their expectations of secondary school. Many pupils, especially those from the project group, reported feeling anxious about their school work prior to

and during the first weeks at secondary school. As mentioned in Category A, Reese, a comparison-group pupil, thought the work would be harder once he had moved to secondary school. When asked to elaborate, he responded as follows:

In primary school, I did very well in all my subjects and thought it would be more work and harder, but it isn't. I thought I would not be able to handle the work because I do work hard and do a lot better than my friends.

The consensus among the pupils was that they had liked primary school because they had been able to do the work. However, they felt somewhat unsure about the work at secondary school. Chris, from the project group, expressed this view: 'I heard the work here was hard, and you have a lot of homework. I don't know if I can cope with all that. I'm not used to it.' Paul, also from the project group, said, 'I liked mathematics, but I know it's a bit harder, and I'm not sure if I'll still like it.' While pupil perceptions about their ability to tackle the work arose as a point of concern for some in the project group, it was not a major concern for those from the comparison group.

These responses from Reese, Chris and Paul triggered other boys, who were also interviewed in this project group but had not contributed as much, to agree that the work was easier at secondary school and that they, too, had done well at primary school. Based on their responses and a review of the field notes taken during the interview, the reasons for this consensus among the boys could be two-fold. It was clear during the group discussion that Reese assumed the role of the main speaker, with the other pupils in the group taking their cues from him. Either they really agreed and were all doing well, or they were not doing well but wanted the others to think that they, like Reese, were doing well.

In contrast, none of the girls who were interviewed in this particular group exhibited confidence in their academic abilities. Their sentiment was that they were doing

'okay'. In the second group of pupils from the project group, Kerry and Nikki were the only two of the 16 girls who mentioned that they were doing well and were comfortable with their assignments. No girls in Reese's group claimed to have been doing well. On reflection, as a researcher, I felt as though I should have followed up with the girls in the group regarding how they felt about their school work. While several pupils from the project group mentioned that they received help from the classroom assistant when working in small groups, they did not mention whether they felt as though they were doing well in their schoolwork. For instance, Kerry, from the project group, said the following:

I like secondary school. Although the work is easy, the teachers are teaching it differently from in primary, but we get the same answer – especially in mathematics. Miss makes it easier to understand.

This response reflects two separate positions raised by Hannan et al. (1996). First, these authors argue that boys have a higher academic self-rating or image than girls. Second, they assert that the notion of academic self-image is a direct reflection on prior educational success, particularly with regard to pupils with higher reading and mathematics skills. Nikki, Kerry and Reese were more vocal about their school work and achievements. This prompted me, as the researcher, to review the reading test scores of these pupils. In accordance with the research conducted by Hannan *et al.*, they all scored well on their reading tests at the beginning and end of the year, compared with their peers from the respective groups.

6.4.2 Personal and social development

The category relating to the perception of personal and social development aligns specifically with phenomenography, which allows for the themes that emerged to be used as a prompt for creating new categories. The theme of personal and social development emerged from an early discussion with pupils regarding school choice

and, to some extent, from the discussion of the role of sports (see Category A – preparedness). As will be seen later in this section, pupils shared relatively little verbal information with me; however, the non-verbal signs made a significant contribution to the conversation. The importance of the perception of personal and social development highlighted the pupils' insecurities, both physical and social, and their association with the psychosocial aspect of transitioning to secondary school. Further, the personal and social development theme in this thesis is specifically linked to the pupils' perceptions regarding their feelings about moving to secondary school and becoming a part of that new school environment. Josh and Barry, from the comparison group, provided their reasons for choosing ESSS, which were mainly revolved around their interest in sports. As suggested by phenomenographic research methods, I revisited the perceptions of the participants, including the response given by Reese in Category A and those of other members in the comparison group. This revisiting of perceptions provided a deeper understanding of what was being discussed with participants (see Chapter 4, Overview of Phenomenography). When I revisited the perception of sports and its importance to the pupils, I realised that the boys from both the project and the comparison groups were more vocal with regard to playing sport and being part of a team, while the girls were more reserved. The positive responses by the boys are represented by the following comments:

Reese (comparison group): I heard that ESSS has good sports, and you get to try out for a lot of teams. I like football and want to be on the team.

Scott (project group): I play footie for my local team and am looking forward to playing footie here too.

During the interview, I wanted to discern why the girls did not display as much interest

in sports or being part of any team. They were asked the question *What is it about sports you don't like?* Najma, the only female pupil to respond verbally, said, 'I do not like to change in front of people or taking shower in front of people, but I like playing sports. I like netball.' The other girls in the group nodded in agreement and made quiet 'hmming' sounds. However, they did not contribute verbally. It was clear at this point that the issue of sports had been exhausted.

Table 6.4 indicates the specific categories regarding the perception of transition and learning that the 32 Y7P pupils reported at the beginning of the academic year.

| No. | Group | Name | Category B |
|-----------------------|-------|---------|------------|
| 1 | PG1 | Josh | |
| 2 | PG1 | Kerry | X |
| 3 | PG1 | Sultan | |
| 4 | PG1 | Wency | X |
| 5 | PG2 | Paul | X |
| 6 | PG2 | Laverne | |
| 7 | PG2 | Nikki | X |
| 8 | PG2 | Sammie | |
| 9 | PG3 | Ali | X |
| 10 | PG3 | Tonia | |
| 11 | PG3 | Katy | |
| 12 | PG3 | Jaiden | X |
| 13 | PG4 | Eric | |
| 14 | PG4 | Scott | X |
| 15 | PG4 | Karly | |
| 16 | PG4 | Chris | X |
| Total response | | | 8 |

| No. | Group | Name | Category B |
|-----------------------|-------|---------|------------|
| 17 | CG5 | Robert | X |
| 18 | CG5 | Reese | X |
| 19 | CG5 | Barry | |
| 20 | CG5 | Najma | X |
| 21 | CG6 | Rihanna | X |
| 22 | CG6 | Micky | |
| 23 | CG6 | Nicole | X |
| 24 | CG6 | Ray | X |
| 25 | CG7 | Bracken | X |
| 26 | CG7 | Jackie | |
| 27 | CG7 | Jai | X |
| 28 | CG7 | Aiden | |
| 29 | CG8 | Belle | X |
| 30 | CG8 | Monet | X |
| 31 | CG8 | Ade | X |
| 32 | CG8 | Mani | X |
| Total response | | | 12 |

Table 6.4 pupil perceptions contributing to the themes of category B – holistic development (note: pg 1-16 represent project-group pupils; cg 17-32 represent comparison-group pupils)

Based on the responses of the pupils from the comparison group, it could be argued that body image and socialising through sport were issues of concern for the girls more than the boys and, thus, could be seen as gender-related. As mentioned by Najma, this is not to claim that girls do not like playing sport, but rather, that issues of changing and taking a shower in front of others are deterrents. Hannan et al. (1997) argue that there is no significant variation in body image based on social class. However, among those who have been bullied and targeted in relation to their

appearance, body image is important. In keeping with previous research, girls were found to have a more negative body image compared with boys, which reflects a wider social issue, beyond the school context.

6.5 Pupil Perceptions - moving out of the transition process

The second round of pupil interviews held at the end of the academic year yielded data regarding their perceptions of the shift to secondary school. These end-of-year interviews produced four categories, which included the two identified in the initial interviews – Category A, preparedness, and Category B, holistic development – and two new ones – Category C, differences between primary and secondary schooling, and Category D, interaction within secondary school. It should be noted that pupils may have already held the perceptions identified in Categories C and D at the beginning of the year. However, they presented no evidence of them at the time. It was not possible to establish whether these perceptions resulted from engagement with the Y7P or whether pupils did not recognise them as issues during the first week at secondary school. This study, however, acknowledges that the perceptions allocated to Categories C and D became evident during the last month of their first year at secondary school, after they had engaged with the Y7P.

Each of the four categories discussed in this section mirrors themes identified in the literature on transfer (see Chapters 2 and 3). The categories emerged specifically from participant perceptions of the transition process through the use of phenomenography, as discussed in Chapter 5.

During end-of-year interviews, the pupils had several responses to questions addressing transfer, transition, and, to some extent, how the issues raised had affected their day-to-day learning. The pupils also discussed whether the new school

met their expectations and identified some of the differences between primary and secondary schooling. Table 6.5 presents the distribution of perceptions that emerged in each category during end-of-year interviews. In the first two categories, A and B, only four pupils contributed. These contributions will be discussed later in their respective categories.

| Category | Themes emerging at the end of the academic year | Number of participants contributing to one or more themes at the end of the year and percentage of total responses (N=32) |
|--|--|---|
| A (Preparedness) | i. Myths | 4 (13%) |
| B (Holistic development) | i. Personal and social development | 4 (13%) |
| C (Differences between primary and secondary school) | i. Having several new teachers ii. New school environment iii. Adjusting to secondary school iv. Longer school days | 29 (91%) |
| D (Interaction within the secondary school) | i. Learning at secondary school ii. Structure of school day iii. Relationship with teachers iv. Being treated as adults | 23 (72%) |

Table 6.5 Four categories of emergent perceptions of transition. Data gained at the end of the first year at secondary school (Source: Analysis of data)

6.5.1 Category A: Preparedness – End-of-Year Perceptions

By the end of the academic year and as pupils move out of the transition process they had become less concerned about preparedness and the events that had transpired before or during their first few weeks at secondary school. Their focus had shifted to various aspects of actually being at secondary school and coping with all the changes associated with the move from primary school. At the beginning of the academic year, there were three themes that constituted the category of preparedness and formed the majority of contributions. However, at the end of the year, this category only contributed one theme, namely *myths*, which emerged as the sole theme of *pupil*

expectations of secondary school (see Table 6.6).

| Category | Themes emerging at the beginning of the year | Number of participants contributing to one or more themes at the beginning of the year and percentage of total responses (N=32) |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| A (Preparedness) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Pupil expectations of secondary school ii. Choosing secondary school iii. Missing primary school | 26 (81%) |

Themes emerging at the beginning of the year that contribute to Category A – preparedness

| Category | Themes emerging at the end of the academic year | Number of participants contributing to one or more themes at the end of the year and percentage of total responses (N=32) |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| A (Preparedness) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Myths | 4 (13%) |

Theme emerging at the end of the year that contributes to Category A – preparedness

Table 6.6 Contributions to Category A – preparedness at the beginning and end of Year 7

By the end of the year, the theme of preparedness was no longer a dominant concern, with only four pupils making contributions. A shift was evident in end-of-year interviews in relation to the participants' perceptions about myths, initial anxieties and the adjustments required for secondary schooling. Based on the reduction of pupil responses related to preparedness during the interviews, it seems safe to suggest that the participants came to the realisation that those early issues concerning being prepared for secondary schooling were less important than the perceptions that developed during the year. Table 6.7 presents the participant contributions to Category A, which reflect the perceptions at the end of the year. This table does not show the number of contributions made to Category A because the phenomenographic method explores variations in perception rather than how many people share the same perception (see Chapters 5).

| No. | Group | Name | Category A |
|------------------------|-------|---------|------------|
| 1 | PG1 | Josh | X |
| 2 | PG1 | Kerry | |
| 3 | PG1 | Sultan | X |
| 4 | PG1 | Wency | |
| 5 | PG2 | Paul | |
| 6 | PG2 | Laverne | |
| 7 | PG2 | Nikki | |
| 8 | PG2 | Sammie | |
| 9 | PG3 | Ali | |
| 10 | PG3 | Tonia | |
| 11 | PG3 | Katy | |
| 12 | PG3 | Jaiden | |
| 13 | PG4 | Eric | X |
| 14 | PG4 | Scott | |
| 15 | PG4 | Karly | X |
| 16 | PG4 | Chris | |
| Total responses | | | 4 |

| No. | Group | Name | Category A |
|------------------------|-------|---------|------------|
| 17 | CG5 | Robert | |
| 18 | CG5 | Reese | |
| 19 | CG5 | Barry | |
| 20 | CG5 | Najma | |
| 21 | CG6 | Rihanna | |
| 22 | CG6 | Micky | |
| 23 | CG6 | Nicole | |
| 24 | CG6 | Ray | |
| 25 | CG7 | Bracken | |
| 26 | CG7 | Jackie | |
| 27 | CG7 | Jai | |
| 28 | CG7 | Aiden | |
| 29 | CG8 | Belle | |
| 30 | CG8 | Monet | |
| 31 | CG8 | Ade | |
| 32 | CG8 | Mani | |
| Total responses | | | 0 |

Table 6.5 pupil perceptions contributing to the themes in category A – Preparedness at the end of year 7

(note: pg 1-16 represent project-group pupils; cg 17-32 represent comparison- group pupils)

6.5.2. Category B: Holistic Development at the End of Year 7

By the end of the academic year, the pupils had become less concerned about their school work, how they felt they were perceived by their teachers and playing sports; their focus had shifted to social aspects, such as making friends and participating in a number of extra-curricular activities. At the beginning of the academic year, there were two main themes that formed the category of holistic development, namely, academic development and personal and social development. At the end of the year, only one theme resurfaced and contributed to this category: personal and social development (see Table 6.8).

| Category | Themes emerging at the beginning of the year | Number of participants contributing to one or more themes at the beginning of the year and percentage of total responses (N=32) |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| B (Holistic development) | i. Academic development ii. Personal and social development | 20 (63%) |

Themes emerging at the beginning of the year that contributed to Category B – holistic development

| Category | Theme emerging at the end of the academic year | Number of participants contributing to one or more themes at the end of the year and percentage of total responses (N=32) |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| B (Holistic development) | i. Personal and social development | 4 (13%) |

Theme emerging at the end of the year that contributed to category B – holistic development

Table 6.6 contributions to category B – holistic development at the end of year 7

During the final interviews at the end of the year, with both the project and comparison groups, four pupils made contributions to Category B when reflecting on their early thoughts of secondary schooling while they had still been at primary school. It is clear that the pupils' perceptions changed, and the aspects they focused on in the first few weeks of secondary school were not as important to them by the end of the year. The contributions that emerged highlight how their perceptions had changed over the course of the Y7P. The new perceptions that emerged at the end of the year focused specifically on their early thoughts regarding their school work, how they saw themselves then as learners, how they felt they were perceived by their teachers and how these thoughts had changed through the course of the year.

For example, Kerry, from the project group, said, 'Everyone said that the work would be hard and you get loads of homework. Yes, that is true, but you get lots of help if you want.' Chris, also from the project group, reported, 'I like the small group. I think I am doing much better in mathematics, better than when in primary school.' Scott,

another participant from the project group, agreed with Chris about the positive aspects of small groups. In addition, Robert, from the comparison group, added, 'I thought it would be hard having so many teachers, but it was not as bad once you get here.'

The early concerns and anxieties that had presented themselves in the first few weeks of secondary schooling were not as dominant by the end of the year. It was clear during these end-of-year interviews that the pupils were more settled and spoke with greater confidence. Table 6.9 identifies the four pupils who made contributions to this category.

| No. | Group | Name | Category B |
|-----------------------|-------|---------|------------|
| 1 | PG1 | Josh | |
| 2 | PG1 | Kerry | X |
| 3 | PG1 | Sultan | |
| 4 | PG1 | Wency | |
| 5 | PG2 | Paul | |
| 6 | PG2 | Laverne | |
| 7 | PG2 | Nikki | |
| 8 | PG2 | Sammie | |
| 9 | PG3 | Ali | |
| 10 | PG3 | Tonia | |
| 11 | PG3 | Katy | |
| 12 | PG3 | Jaiden | |
| 13 | PG4 | Eric | |
| 14 | PG4 | Scott | X |
| 15 | PG4 | Karly | |
| 16 | PG4 | Chris | X |
| Total response | | | 3 |

| No. | Group | Name | Category B |
|-----------------------|-------|---------|------------|
| 17 | CG5 | Robert | X |
| 18 | CG5 | Reese | |
| 19 | CG5 | Barry | |
| 20 | CG5 | Najma | |
| 21 | CG6 | Rihanna | |
| 22 | CG6 | Micky | |
| 23 | CG6 | Nicole | |
| 24 | CG6 | Ray | |
| 25 | CG7 | Bracken | |
| 26 | CG7 | Jackie | |
| 27 | CG7 | Jai | |
| 28 | CG7 | Aiden | |
| 29 | CG8 | Belle | |
| 30 | CG8 | Monet | |
| 31 | CG8 | Ade | |
| 32 | CG8 | Mani | |
| Total response | | | 1 |

Table 6.7 pupil contributions to category B – holistic development
(Note: PG 1-16 represent project-group pupils; CG 17-32 represent comparison-group pupils)

The focus of Category B was to highlight the pupils' perceptions regarding their development during the transfer and transition process. When comparing the participants' thoughts from the beginning of the academic year to the end of the year, it was clear that the support received from the teaching staff during the year, as well as their own developing maturity over the same period, had led the pupils from both groups to become more settled and confident in communicating their feelings. The following two categories of description, C – differences between primary and secondary school – and D – interaction between the pupil and teachers in the school environment – are new categories that emerged at the end of the year.

6.5.3 Category C: Differences between Primary and Secondary School

The participants' perceptions of the differences between primary and secondary school emerged as a new category during the final interviews at the end of Year 7. Some aspects of this category, however, had already been mentioned when the pupils discussed missing primary school and some of the anxieties they had experienced at the beginning of the year. When interviewed, the pupils from both groups contributed to this category by providing their perceptions, which were subsequently grouped into four themes: having several teachers, being in a new school environment, adjusting to secondary school and having longer school days.

Category C, which focuses on the differences between primary and secondary school, emerged as a new shared perception at the end of the school year. Twenty-four of the 32 pupils interviewed made contributions to this category. The participants mainly discussed the differences between the academic work and overall management of their secondary and primary schools. The differences between the two types of schools included the number of teachers; variety of subjects; differences in the size of the buildings; length of the school day; and physical differences in size, as they were the smallest pupils in the secondary school. Paul, from the project group, said, 'Secondary school is a little different than I expected. It's a lot bigger, and I thought we were going to have more teachers. We have to spend more time in school. I guess that's a good thing.' Nicole, from the comparison group, said, 'I like having all the different teachers, but it's daunting trying to remember where to go for each class and to remember their names.'

6.5.3.i Having several new teachers

For many pupils, especially for those in the comparison group, the main difference between primary and secondary schooling was having several teachers and a variety of new subjects. Jackie, from the comparison group, explained that 'Moving from room to room is good. See, if you act up in one class and go to another, you will not get told off for what just happened, and you have another chance.' Eric, from the project group, who did not have the opportunity to change rooms for all of his subjects but would have liked the opportunity to do so, reported, 'In changing classes, you get to see more of the school. In primary school, we were always in one classroom, just like how we have it now.' This was the perception of most pupils in the project group at the beginning of the year, and it had not changed by the end of the school year. They all agreed that it would have been nice to have had the opportunity to change rooms; however, as will be discussed later, they also liked having one room as their base. They enjoyed having one teacher and the support they were given in each of their lessons.

PB (interviewer): How do you feel about the different teachers? Is it better than primary?

Bracken (comparison group): Yes, because you may not get along with one teacher, like you had in primary, and you have to be in that class for a year, but now in secondary school, you only have to see a teacher once.

Katy (project group): It's good.

PB: Why?

Katy: Because you would have loads of teachers, and if you're not having a good day and things aren't so good and you get told off, the next teacher doesn't know what happened.

Nicole (comparison group): Because if you don't like the one teacher you have, then it doesn't matter, because you have other teachers you may get on with.

Although all the pupils interviewed from the project group would have preferred one teacher for each subject, as in the comparison group of classes, they did enjoy the opportunity of changing classrooms for subjects other than English, mathematics, literacy and Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE); they also enjoyed being in the same room with their main teacher and friends.

6.5.3.ii New school environment

One initial impression of secondary school that was common to all pupils in the project and comparison groups was the remarkably bigger physical space compared with their primary schools. Ray, from the comparison group, joked, 'I get a lot of exercise every day now.' Another pupil from the comparison group, Sammie, said, 'At primary school it was smaller, and we knew where to find everything, but at the beginning of the year, after moving to secondary school, it was difficult. But it is okay now.'

Most of the literature on transfer and transition has found that meeting new people in an unfamiliar school and classroom environment can be challenging for transferring pupils (Eccles 1996; Earley 2007; Howe 2011). During end-of-year interviews, the pupils discussed how they felt about meeting their new classmates, teachers and support staff in the new school and classroom environment. Some pupils described

the large size of the secondary school enthusiastically and in positive terms, claiming that it offered them more opportunities to meet new people and make new friends.

Tonia, from one of the project classes, made the following declaration:

Secondary school is really good; you have to be more independent and responsible and make new friends. I like it because they treat us like adults, unlike in primary school, where we were treated like babies.

Making the transition to secondary schooling does not only involve adapting to longer school days. Most participants also reported having to travel longer distances to reach school. Almost all the pupils mentioned that it took longer to commute to secondary school.

PB (interviewer): What are some of the differences between primary and secondary school?

Josh (project group): Getting up earlier.

Paul (project group): Have to travel longer to get to school.

PB: What time did you have to get up in the morning when you were at primary school?

Scott (project group): At eight o'clock. I have to get up by seven now.

Laverne (project group): I'm up by seven too.

It was clear during the interviews with the pupils that they were more comfortable and happier with their new environment at the end of the year. They initially held certain concerns regarding meeting new people, including peers and teachers; missing their friends from primary school; and adjusting to the larger campus of the secondary school, along with the responsibilities that accompany its negotiation. However, by the end of the year, these concerns had dissipated.

6.5.3.iii Adjusting to secondary school

The next theme that emerged from the pupil interviews, which formed the category of differences between primary and secondary school, involved adjusting to the change in status from being among the physically biggest and oldest pupils in primary school to becoming the smallest and youngest in secondary school. This change in status was linked to the pupils feeling more vulnerable in terms of being 'pushed around' by the older pupils, as well as by those who were physically bigger. These status changes were issues for only a few pupils from both groups. For instance, Kerry reported, 'You go from being the oldest, and then you're the youngest.' Three other pupils, Sultan, from the project group, and Ray and Nicole, from the comparison group, strongly agreed with this view and provided the exact same or similar responses during the interview. Likewise, when responding to issues associated with adjusting to secondary school, four pupils – Jaiden, Mickey, Aiden and Mani – gave similar responses or repeated what other pupils had said about being pushed around. Jaiden, from project group, said, 'You get a bit pushed about when you're, like, going out of the door and getting lunch, but it doesn't really bother me.' Bracken, from the comparison group, also reported, 'You just get pushed around when you're trying to get to your next class. It's always a rush to go to class.'

During end-of-year interviews, as pupils reflected on their move from primary to secondary school and discussed the differences involved, they reported having anxieties about being the physically smallest students in the school. While this issue was not raised during the initial interviews at the beginning of the year, as pupils moved through the year this became important to some.

6.5.3.iv Longer school days

The final theme that emerged from the exit interviews related to having longer school days. Progressing from primary to secondary schooling also meant that the increased amount of homework meant less personal or down time, while longer school hours were a concern for some. Pupils from both groups shared this perception. Jai, from the comparison group, said, 'I get home around five, and the day's gone, but I still have to do my homework,.'. Similarly, Aiden, from the comparison group, said, 'You don't have much more time to socialise, not if you do all your homework. I hardly see my friends outside of school.' When asked if they would change anything about secondary schooling, some participants suggested less or no homework and shorter days, with Josh, from the project group, saying, 'One thing that would make school better is if they take out homework, let us go at three o'clock and no detention.' Pupils from both groups agreed with this sentiment. Aiden and Nicole, from the project group, concurred by adding their perspective on longer days and alluded, 'When I get home from school, I don't feel like doing hours of homework'. They, along with other pupils, said that there is not much time to be with friends.

| No. | Group | Name | Category C |
|-----------------------|-------|---------|------------|
| 1 | PG1 | Josh | X |
| 2 | PG1 | Kerry | X |
| 3 | PG1 | Sultan | X |
| 4 | PG1 | Wency | |
| 5 | PG2 | Paul | X |
| 6 | PG2 | Laverne | X |
| 7 | PG2 | Nikki | X |
| 8 | PG2 | Sammie | X |
| 9 | PG3 | Ali | X |
| 10 | PG3 | Tonia | X |
| 11 | PG3 | Katy | X |
| 12 | PG3 | Jaiden | X |
| 13 | PG4 | Eric | X |
| 14 | PG4 | Scott | X |
| 15 | PG4 | Karly | X |
| 16 | PG4 | Chris | X |
| Total response | | | 15 |

| No. | Group | Name | Category C |
|-----------------------|-------|---------|------------|
| 17 | CG5 | Robert | X |
| 18 | CG5 | Reese | X |
| 19 | CG5 | Barry | X |
| 20 | CG5 | Najma | X |
| 21 | CG6 | Rihanna | X |
| 22 | CG6 | Micky | X |
| 23 | CG6 | Nicole | X |
| 24 | CG6 | Ray | X |
| 25 | CG7 | Bracken | X |
| 26 | CG7 | Jackie | X |
| 27 | CG7 | Jai | X |
| 28 | CG7 | Aiden | X |
| 29 | CG8 | Belle | X |
| 30 | CG8 | Monet | |
| 31 | CG8 | Ade | |
| 32 | CG8 | Mani | X |
| Total response | | | 14 |

Table 6.8 pupils contributing to category C– differences between primary and SECONDARYSCHOOL (Note: PG 1-16 represent project-group pupils; CG 17-32 represent comparison-group pupils)

The most prominent difference between primary and secondary schooling for most pupils was the increased variety in their experiences of learning. Other than a few exceptions from the project group, the pupils perceived this change to their daily routine as an exciting challenge. Sultan, from the project group, said, 'I'm enjoying secondary more than primary because there are different teachers to get to know and science with the experiments.'

Table 6.10 presents the pupils from both groups who contributed to one or more of the themes that form Category C – differences between primary and secondary school.

6.5.4 Category D: Interactions within the Secondary School

Category D highlights interactions within the secondary school by focusing on the relationships between pupils, teaching methods and the secondary school environment. The four themes that emerged to form this category are learning at secondary school, the structure of the school day, the relationships with teachers and being treated as adults.

Many pupils from both the project and comparison groups emphasised that their secondary school teachers were much stricter compared with their teachers in primary school and that a different standard of behaviour was expected. Eighteen of the 32 pupils interviewed mentioned themes that contributed to this category at the end of the school year.

6.5.4.i Learning at secondary school

The first theme in Category D reflects the pupils' perceptions regarding learning in

secondary school. Pupils in both groups emphasised links between learning and the interactions between them and their teachers. An analysis of the interviews led to the notion that success at secondary school was linked to their relationships with their teachers. For example, Josh, from the project group, offered the following comment:

Having one teacher makes maths easier because Sir shows he cares, and he knows where I'm struggling and helps me a lot.

Sammie, also from the project group, added the following:

I thought the teachers in secondary wouldn't care as much, but they try to help you to understand what's going on. In class, Miss likes us to ask questions, and she tries to answer them.

Participants from the comparison group shared these views and stressed the importance of their interactions with the teachers. One of them, Najma, said the following:

Although we have different teachers, they try to get to know your names and not call you 'Hey, You'. When a teacher knows me, I feel confident and try my hardest to work hard. I like that.

Mani, from the comparison group, added the following:

If the teachers don't show they care, it's hard to work and do your best. If they care about me, then I care about the work.

6.5.4.ii Structure of the school day

Many pupils in both groups claimed that the different structure of secondary schooling helped their learning. By the end of the year, the pupils from the project group exhibited a greater acceptance of having one teacher for some subjects than they had at the beginning of the year. They agreed that this change had made learning easier and reduced the anxieties of moving from primary to secondary school. Pupils from both groups mentioned the strictness of teachers regarding pupil behaviour and how

this had promoted their learning. Scott from the project group said the following:

In comparing primary and secondary school, the teachers in secondary school were much stricter than at primary. They expect us to behave different, like, grown up.

Some pupils from the comparison group provided their perspectives of teacher strictness in relation to homework, finishing class work and talking while the teachers were talking.

Ade: If you don't finish your work in class, you have to stay in and finish it during the break.

Rihanna: Teachers are strict with handing in homework. If it's not signed, then they tell you off about it.

Mani: We aren't allowed to talk out of turn in class.

Ray: Yeah, talking – we cannot talk and laugh, but sometimes you have to talk to your mate to ask for something, mainly about work, and you're caught talking.

Aiden: Secondary is stricter. We used to get away with loads of stuff and still did well in primary.

Most pupils described the formal discipline structure of secondary schooling, including detention, as strict and relatively different from their primary schools. However, they mentioned that good behaviour was recognised by teachers, which, in turn, had a positive effect on them. Although many characterised secondary schooling as being strict, others noted that some teachers were stricter than others. Some participants also indicated that the punishment for improper behaviour varied between individual teachers. One pupil from the comparison group, Barry, said, 'Sometimes you can get away with, like, say, talking in some teachers' classes but not others.'

Pupils from the project group reported that they had to become accustomed to the rules being stricter than they had been in primary school. They also said that their teachers were usually justified when they enforced the rules because their peers were behaving inappropriately. However, they highlighted that inappropriate behaviour could result in the whole class being punished. For instance, Chris said, 'A few children in our class do misbehave, and this distracts us. The teachers have to stop the lesson to talk to them. This is a distraction.' Sammie elaborated on this point: 'I'd like to learn more, but sometimes they mess in school. The teachers sometimes have to shout to get everyone's attention.'

While the pupils expressed the differences in teacher attitudes, including strictness, they agreed that a degree of firmness with pupils was important to aid in their learning. In addition, they mentioned that having a good relationship with their teachers was vital.

6.5.4.iii Relationship with teachers

The theme of pupil relationships with teachers emerged from the discussions regarding the difference in strictness between primary and secondary schooling. As raised earlier, many pupils reported that building new relationships with teachers at secondary school was important to their learning. However, few pupils mentioned that building relationships in a new school environment with new rules and structures posed a significant challenge. In end-of-year interviews, most pupils in both groups reported that their perceptions of secondary school teachers had changed. Several pupils admitted that they initially had thought that they would not like their new teachers or not be able to build relationships with them. For instance, Wency, from the project group, said, 'When I first got here, I missed my primary school and

teachers so much; I didn't think I'd get on with the new teachers. But then I had Sir for some lessons, and I got on with him just like my primary teacher.'

Pupils also reported that their experiences with their secondary school teachers had been both positive and negative, based on the level of interaction they had experienced with them through the year. Primary schools utilise a notably different pedagogy from secondary schools. In primary schooling, pupils experience much more interaction with their teachers, which helps build positive relationships between the two. In secondary schools, however, pupils interact with a different teacher for each subject, which reduces the amount of interaction they have with individual teachers. This was hardly the case for pupils in the project group, who had more interaction with one teacher; these pupils expressed positive views regarding pupil-teacher interactions.

Sammie (project group): If you work hard and don't mess about in lessons, then the teachers will like you. Once they like you, then lessons will be easier.

PB (interviewer): What do you mean *the lessons will be easier*?

Sammie: Well, like, you'll want to do the work to make the teacher happy.

Interestingly, all the participants mentioned that their positive relationships with teachers were based on two elements. The first was the written evaluative feedback the teacher provided in response to their work, which was regarded as supportive. Second, the pupils valued the verbal feedback provided to their oral questions. The pupils reported thinking that, if they worked hard, their teachers would like them more. During end-of-year interviews, 13 of the 16 project-group pupils reported having shared good relationships with their main teacher and five specialist teachers. However, seven of the 16 comparison-group pupils during end-of-year interviews reported that they did not have good relationships with all or most of their teachers.

PB (interviewer): What do you mean by a *good relationship* with your teachers?

Barry (comparison group): We don't see them as much, and they hardly know you. In primary, the teacher knew all of our names, and that made you feel special.

Rihanna (comparison group): The teachers in secondary are too strict, and that makes it difficult to like them.

Najma (comparison group): It's difficult for teachers to get to know us because we only see them for a few periods a week, unlike in primary when we only had one teacher.

Some pupils from the comparison group, such as Najma, noted that having a relationship with their teachers, as they had done in primary school, was difficult, mainly because of the increased number of teachers at secondary school, who also taught numerous pupils. However, several pupils from both groups reported instances where they had enjoyed positive interactions with their secondary-school teachers. Those in the project group reported more positive pupil-teacher relationships than those in the comparison group, due to having spent more time with their core-subject teachers.

6.5.4.iii Being treated as adults

The final theme that emerged to form Category D regarded how pupil interactions within the secondary school related to them being treated as adults. While most pupils, especially those from the comparison group, mentioned that being treated as an adult was a positive attribute of secondary schooling, they referred to this mainly in the context of their learning, rather than their age. Most pupils clearly appreciated the increased responsibility that accompanied their transfer to secondary school,

reporting that being treated as an adult and playing a more proactive role in their learning were positive aspects of the transition experience. Pupils from both groups mentioned that, despite all the changes, rules and strictness of the teachers, they felt more liberated at secondary school. When asked what they meant by this, Eric, from the project group, responded, 'In primary, they treat you like a baby, like you don't know how to do anything or you cannot remember things. We had loads of letters to take home.' Ade, from the comparison group, noted, 'You're allowed to go outside the school during lunch. You don't have to stay on the playground, like in primary school.' Similar responses were extremely common among those from the comparison group.

The end-of-year interviews clearly indicated that most of the pupils from both groups considered that moving to secondary school offered them a greater variety in terms of what they were learning and in their relationships with teachers and support staff. Attending secondary school also raised their sense of responsibility and encouraged them to develop and mature in both social and academic contexts. Furthermore, it engaged the participants more directly, allowing them greater participation in decisions regarding their own education. Overall, most pupils described their first year at secondary school in particularly positive terms.

| No. | Group | Name | Category D |
|-----|-------|---------|------------|
| 1 | PG1 | Josh | X |
| 2 | PG1 | Kerry | X |
| 3 | PG1 | Sultan | X |
| 4 | PG1 | Wency | X |
| 5 | PG2 | Paul | X |
| 6 | PG2 | Laverne | X |
| 7 | PG2 | Nikki | X |
| 8 | PG2 | Sammie | |
| 9 | PG3 | Ali | X |
| 10 | PG3 | Tonia | |
| 11 | PG3 | Katy | X |
| 12 | PG3 | Jaiden | |
| 13 | PG4 | Eric | X |
| 14 | PG4 | Scott | X |
| 15 | PG4 | Karly | X |
| 16 | PG4 | Chris | X |

| No. | Group | Name | Category D |
|-----|-------|---------|------------|
| 17 | CG5 | Robert | X |
| 18 | CG5 | Reese | X |
| 19 | CG5 | Barry | X |
| 20 | CG5 | Najma | X |
| 21 | CG6 | Rihanna | X |
| 22 | CG6 | Micky | |
| 23 | CG6 | Nicole | |
| 24 | CG6 | Ray | X |
| 25 | CG7 | Bracken | |
| 26 | CG7 | Jackie | |
| 27 | CG7 | Jai | |
| 28 | CG7 | Aiden | X |
| 29 | CG8 | Belle | |
| 30 | CG8 | Monet | X |
| 31 | CG8 | Ade | X |
| 32 | CG8 | Mani | X |

| | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|--|--|----|------------------------|--|--|----|
| Total responses | | | 13 | Total responses | | | 10 |
|------------------------|--|--|----|------------------------|--|--|----|

Table 6.9 categories of description showing pupil comments during end-of-year interviews

(Note: PG 1-6 represent project-group pupils; CG 1—32 represent comparison-group pupils)

The differences and similarities between pupils' perceptions at the beginning and end of Year 7 are presented through a discussion of the outcome space, which is subsequently presented. The outcome space illustrates the movement of change in pupils' perceptions from a utilitarian content perspective to one of self-reflection. For the pupils from the project classes, this change emerged as a result of engaging with the Y7P. It should be noted that the pupils from the comparison group who experienced the usual routine of secondary school also reported growth when reflecting on the whole year.

From the interviews and analyses, it was clear that most pupils no longer perceived learning as something that just occurs; instead, it was something that they experienced. Many also realised that they could play an active role in their learning. Upon reflection at the end of the year, both groups were able to discuss the transition process, their learning, and the issues that had affected them and their ability to succeed in secondary school. The views expressed in relation to success tended to focus on teacher interaction and pupil behaviour. Table 6.11 lists those who made contributions to Category D.

6.6 Analysis of perceptions of transition and learning at the end of the academic year

Table 6.12 shows that pupils held a variety of perceptions about transition and their learning at the beginning and end of the academic year. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Categories A and B emerged at the beginning of the year. Some of these perceptions resurfaced during end-of-year interviews and are represented in the final

categories of description presented in Table 6.10, which also identifies those pupils who contributed to each category.

| No. | Group | Name | Category A | Category B | Category C | Category D |
|------------------------|-------|---------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 1 | PG1 | Josh | X | | X | X |
| 2 | PG1 | Kerry | | X | X | X |
| 3 | PG1 | Sultan | X | | X | X |
| 4 | PG1 | Wency | | | | X |
| 5 | PG2 | Paul | | | X | X |
| 6 | PG2 | Laverne | | | X | X |
| 7 | PG2 | Nikki | | | X | X |
| 8 | PG2 | Sammie | | | X | |
| 9 | PG3 | Ali | | | X | X |
| 10 | PG3 | Tonia | | | X | |
| 11 | PG3 | Katy | | | X | X |
| 12 | PG3 | Jaiden | | | X | |
| 13 | PG4 | Eric | X | | | X |
| 14 | PG4 | Scott | | X | X | X |
| 15 | PG4 | Karly | X | | X | X |
| 16 | PG4 | Chris | | X | X | X |
| 17 | CG5 | Robert | | X | X | X |
| 18 | CG5 | Reese | | | X | X |
| 19 | CG5 | Barry | | | X | X |
| 20 | CG5 | Najma | | | X | X |
| 21 | CG6 | Rihanna | | | X | X |
| 22 | CG6 | Micky | | | X | |
| 23 | CG6 | Nicole | | | X | |
| 24 | CG6 | Ray | | | X | X |
| 25 | CG7 | Bracken | | | X | |
| 26 | CG7 | Jackie | | | X | |
| 27 | CG7 | Jai | | | X | |
| 28 | CG7 | Aiden | | | X | X |
| 29 | CG8 | Belle | | | | |
| 30 | CG8 | Monet | | | X | X |
| 31 | CG8 | Ade | | | | X |
| 32 | CG8 | Mani | | | X | X |
| Total responses | 55 | | 4 | 4 | 29 | 23 |

6.7 Phenomenographical outcome space

The outcome space of this study is presented based on the different manners in which pupils from both the project and comparison groups perceived their experiences during their transition from primary to secondary schooling. It consists of the categories of descriptions of the perceptions reported by the pupils, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Specifically, the outcome space highlights variations in

the perceptions of the newly transferred pupils in the Y7P in relation to their transition to secondary schooling and their ability to become autonomous learners.

As discussed throughout this chapter, both Category A (preparedness) and Category B (holistic development) are content-focused and underpinned by a utilitarian viewpoint. These categories and the themes within them identify the initial perceptions of the transition process from their perspectives. The participants tended to adjust uncritically to their perceived expectations, which were gained mainly through information from family and friends, in order to cope with all the changes in their school environment. The pupils recognised and understood that being promoted to a higher grade is a natural progression that they had already experienced in primary school as they had moved through Years 1-6. The move from primary to secondary school, however, was radically different because they were changing types of school as well as moving up a grade.

Both Category C, which includes the pupils' perceptions of the differences between primary and secondary schooling, and Category D, which includes the pupils' ideas of their interaction at secondary school and their understanding of the academic changes involved, emerged after the pupils had experienced the transition facilitated by the Y7P. Many phenomenographic studies have investigated these perceptions and how they moved from being on a surface level to developing greater depth over time (Marton et al., 1993). In this study, Categories A and B reflected a movement from inherited thinking to the complex individual perspectives represented in the new categories, C and D.

Table 6.10 identifies the changes in the perspectives of the students that emerged at the end of the academic year. In this study, the classifications of the extent of change in perspectives were primarily obtained based on self-reporting by the pupils making

the transition to secondary school. At the beginning and end of the academic year, the participants were asked to specifically discuss issues related to transitioning to secondary school, which included their expectations and choice of secondary school and the differences between primary and secondary schooling. It should be noted that the changes in perceptions as noted in this study were determined by qualitative rather than quantitative techniques, as it is difficult to quantify particular changes in an individual's perception of a certain phenomenon.

The level of change in the pupils' perceptions, which was used to build their collective perspectives, is represented in Table 6.10 as *moderate*, *low* or *none*. For example, the first group of pupils represents a moderate level of change. This change refers to their interview responses, where a utilitarian perspective was replaced by one of self-reflection, along with evidence of understanding their role in the learning process. It was clear throughout the analysis of both groups of interviews that the majority of pupils, especially those from the project group, were more confident and vocal during end-of-year interviews. As Table 6.10 reflects, 26 of 32 pupils demonstrated a moderate level of change in their thinking regarding secondary school. The second group of pupils, the remaining six, exhibited a low level of change in their perceptions. These six pupils displayed confidence from the beginning of the year, as well as throughout the year, and they were more comfortable with their expectations of secondary schooling compared to the other students. The final group represents those who experienced little or no alteration in their perceptions. In this study, there were no pupils who fit this category. This outcome can be attributed to the identification of particular pupils as being more vulnerable before they entered secondary school, wherein they were placed in a supportive environment both academically and holistically.

| Changes in perception | Individual participants | Level of change |
|---|--|-------------------------|
| Developed from a utilitarian perception of transfer and transition during the transition year to secondary school to one of self-reflection and discovering themselves as autonomous learners | Wency, Paul, Laverne, Nikki, Sammie, Ali, Tonia, Katy, Jaiden, Scott and Chris (project-group pupils); Robert, Barry, Najma, Rihanna, Micky, Nicole, Ray, Bracken, Jackie, Jai, Aiden, Belle, Monet, Mani and Ade (comparison-group pupils N=26) | Moderate (26/32 pupils) |
| Developed or remained within learning-and-understanding or developmental perceptions of themselves during the transition year | Josh, Kerry, Sultan, Eric and Karly (project-group pupils); Reese (comparison-group pupil N=6) | Low (6/32 pupils) |
| Developed or remained within content or utilitarian perceptions by the end of the transition year | There were no pupils who failed to show growth either in their academic ability or holistic development. It was clear that all pupils had settled well, especially those in the project classes. | None |

Table 6.11 changes in perceptions or thinking about the transition to secondary school

By the end of the school year, and as highlighted in the literature review, it was thought that almost half the pupils making the transition to secondary school would remain unsettled by the end of Year 7. However, the pupils participating in the Y7P were all found to be fairly or well settled by the end of the academic year. What was most note-worthy when mapping the pupil perceptions was their shift from the passive acceptance of the choice of secondary school based on the opinion of others to perceiving themselves as active learners and actors at secondary school. Most of the interview responses, especially those recorded at the end of the year and related to learning, were from pupils in the project classes. This observation could stem from the structure of their day, where the majority of their classes were with the same teacher and pupils in the same room.

Although only pupils in the project classes experienced changes in the delivery of their lessons, as outlined in the Y7P project design in Chapter 1, the pupils in the comparison group who experienced the normal routine of secondary schooling also made a good transition. The latter group of pupils was initially anxious about their first year at secondary school. However, within a few months, the majority of them were more comfortable with the new school environment and the expectations their

teachers had of them. Table 6.13 depicts how the perceptions of a majority of the pupils shifted through the course of the year from a utilitarian perspective to a multifaceted one. While the pupils were discussing the changes in their perceptions of secondary schooling, their observations and depth of discussion indicated an elevated level of maturity. Table 6.13 also highlights the finding that a minority of the newly transferred pupils experienced sustained transition difficulties and had greater trouble than others in settling into their new environment.

Those students who reported feeling well prepared due to having a good idea of what to expect and by noting the connections between the primary and secondary curricula were less likely to experience difficulties during their first year at secondary school. In respect to the Y7P design, this study found that being exposed to the additional support and having the same teacher for four subjects in the first year of secondary schooling led to fewer transition issues, which in turn, allowed pupils to settle into secondary school more quickly. This is not to claim that there were no fundamental flaws in the design of the project but, rather, that the teaching staff did effectively implement and meet the objectives of the Y7P. The design flaws and recommendations for change will be discussed in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

6.8 Implications of the Findings of the Year 7 Project and the Transition to Secondary School

Thus far, this chapter has discussed and categorised pupil perceptions regarding the transfer and transition process. In order to further the understanding of the same, a relational model was designed to explain changes in the reported perceptions of transition and learning through the academic year. The purpose of the model was to inform future proposals so as to support the pupils transferring to secondary school. The model reflects a change in focus, from viewing transition as an event to perceiving

it as a process that stimulates independent learning. The model highlights the manner in which pupils can become critically attuned to particular aspects of the transition process and their role in facilitating their own learning.

The four categories that emerged from the pupils' perceptions of transition and learning at the end of the academic year, A (preparedness), B (holistic development), C (differences between primary and secondary school) and D (interactions within the secondary school), were examined in this chapter. This analysis enabled the formulation of a more comprehensive picture of the perceptual change pathway that pupils experienced during their transition to secondary school. The following section reflects on the changes in pupil perceptions from a content and utilitarian perspective to one of developmental self-reflection. These shifts in focus and perspective suggest that pupils are able to become increasingly aware of the critical aspects involved in understanding their transition and their learning during the transition process.

Further implications for the teaching staff at the school in which this study was based are discussed in Chapter 7. The main focus will be an exploration of subsidiary research questions designed to address professional perceptions of the Y7P. Salient questions are raised regarding whether the intervention served its intended purpose, the impact the staff thought it had on pupils (if any) and whether the initiative should be replicated.

6.9 Summary

This chapter presented and analysed pupil perceptions of a school-based study that addressed issues associated with the transfer and transition from primary to secondary schooling. The research findings reported in this chapter indicate that the participants' perceptions before the transition were limited to Categories A and B,

which reflected limited pupil knowledge of secondary schooling before transferring from primary school and during the first few weeks of attending secondary school. During end-of-year interviews, the pupil perceptions of the transition had evolved, as there was little mention of the main issues noted during beginning-of-year interviews, that is, those contributing to Categories A and B. The majority of end-of-year interviews produced new thoughts and perceptions, which led to the formation of two additional categories. The introduction of Categories C and D suggests that by the end of the transition year, the participants tended to move from lower order to higher order thinking, involving perceptions that are more complex. Table 6.13, which summarises the findings presented in this chapter, illustrates that more than three-quarters of the pupils reported shifts in their perceptions, from a utilitarian perspective towards one of autonomy, and an understanding of their own role in learning in the secondary school environment after participating in the Y7P.

While most pupils settled successfully into secondary school life, their attitudes towards the school and their teachers tended to be more positive at the end of the first year compared with those at the beginning of the year. The analysis found tentative evidence that those in the four project classes, which focused on the integration process, were more likely to foster positive attitudes towards school than those in the comparison group.

Chapter 7 – Teaching Staff Perceptions of the Year 7 Project

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the teaching staff's perceptions of the Year 7 Project, which were collected through interviews at the beginning and end of the school year. For the purposes of this chapter, *teaching staff* is used as a collective term that refers to all adults who worked with Year 7 pupils daily. This group of adults includes eight teachers from the project and comparison groups (four from each group), the Special Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO), six teaching assistants and one learning mentor. The other members of the staff who were interviewed were the deputy head and head teachers. This chapter addresses the secondary subsidiary research question raised in this study: *What are the staff perceptions of the Year 7 Project Initiative and pupil learning before and after engaging with the project?*

7.2 Perceptions of the Initial Phase of Transition to Secondary School

The teaching staff's perceptions of the pupils' transition to secondary school are outlined in the set of four descriptive categories discussed below. The first two categories, A and B, emerged from interview data collected at the beginning of the academic year, while the remaining categories, C and D, emerged through end-of-year interviews. Many themes from the first two categories re-surfaced during the final interviews. In addition to these two themes, there were also other new themes that emerged. These will be discussed in turn in this chapter.

Analyses from interview data associated with the perceptions of transition held by the teaching staff, including the deputy and head teachers, during the initial phase of

transition made up two main categories of description. These descriptions emerged from the data collected at the beginning of the academic year. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, two main descriptive categories were identified from the individual, beginning-of-year interviews with the teaching staff.

Category A: A successful transition involves being well prepared. A transition initiative involves being well prepared through organisation and a good design that facilitates learning.

Category B: A successful transition allows pupils to settle quickly. A transition initiative provides opportunities that encourage learning and facilitate settling into a new environment.

Table 7.1 represents Categories A and B and the themes that emerged from the first set of interviews held during the first few weeks of secondary schooling. The four themes form the basis of discussion in each category. In Table 7.1, the first column represents the categories of description, based on the emerging themes identified in the interviews with the teaching staff, the deputy head and head teacher. The second column presents the themes that emerged from the teaching staff's interviews. The final column shows the number of teaching staff who contributed to each category.

| Category | Themes emerging | Number of teaching staff contributions N=18 |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| A (Being well prepared) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being organised | 14 |
| B (Settling in) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for pupil learning • Academic and social development • Creating a familiar school environment | 18 |

Table 7.1 categories and themes that emerged at the beginning of year 7
(Source: Analysis of beginning-of-year interview data with the teaching staff)

7.2.1 Category A: A Successful Transition Involves Being Well Prepared

Many of the teaching staff recognised the importance of being prepared when handling pupils who are moving from primary school to secondary schooling (see Table 7.2). The staff also argued that preparation should occur long before pupils enter secondary school. For example, Lauren, a former primary-school teacher working in one of the project-group classes mentioned, 'Pupils should begin thinking of moving to their new school from Year 5, and they can get help with their anxieties.' In addition, Verona, a secondary specialist and project class teacher, argued that the receiving secondary schools should be prepared:

If we are not prepared, the children will sense this, and they will be unsettled for a longer period of time. Our role as teachers should be to have the necessary things in place for them.

This point was worth mentioning solely because Verona, as a secondary-school teacher, had volunteered to teach in one of the project classes. It was early in the project that she recognised that secondary school teachers were not actually prepared for incoming pupils and needed to focus on the aspects of settling them in as quickly as possible.

7.2.1 Being organised

During the initial interviews, what emerged and echoed throughout this study was the need to support pupils to prepare for secondary school. Teachers and support staff, along with the deputy head and head teacher, recognised that incoming pupils who had low literacy levels required timely extra support. They all looked forward to working on the Y7P, which was thought to possess the potential to support and prepare pupils during their first year of secondary schooling.

The first theme in Category A – being well prepared – refers to the teaching staff being organised to receive the newly transferred pupils. The head teacher and teaching staff were asked whether they had received information on all, most or some pupils from their feeder schools. In order to obtain this information, they met with feeder school teachers on a regular basis before the beginning of the new academic year. These meetings were designed to ensure that the organisation of the Y7P was progressing towards its intended goals, which involved easing the transition from primary to secondary schooling and, once the pupils were settled, raising standards in literacy learning. To ensure proper organisation of the Y7P, the staff had to make initial decisions and pre-empt pupil requirements so that the necessary provisions were available to support their successful transition to secondary school. Fern, the head teacher, said the following:

Information received from the [primary] school was collected and collated to build up a profile of each child. If they had behavioural problems, or spoke English as an Additional Language, or had some medical problem, or had an Individual Education Plan, or had a physical need, it was all put on the system so that, when we pull up the child's name, we can have a clear picture of that child.

As part of the preparation for supporting Year 7 pupils and meeting their academic needs, three former primary teachers were recruited: Caleb, Nicole and Lauren. It was hoped that these project group teachers, with their generalist teaching ability, would support the notion of teaching four core subjects to the same pupils. During their individual interviews, these former primary-school teachers expressed positive perceptions of the project design and their role within it. They all expressed excitement about the challenge of working with older pupils of a lower ability using primary-school pedagogy – a concept with which they were familiar. Caleb, one of the former primary-school project teachers, explained:

At first, I thought it would be chaotic with all the lower ability together, which one would think could be a recipe for disaster.

Nicole, another former primary-school teacher of a project-group class, offered the following comment:

The project provided a new dimension to learning and will support those who are at a lower level.

For these three former primary-school teachers, the design and organisation of the Y7P was the principal aspect that attracted them to be a part of the initiative. The main idea, according to the head teacher, was that a generalist perspective to teaching would be adopted by incorporating primary teachers into the project, thereby providing a familiar learning environment for pupils. In discussing the project and its aims, the four project-group teachers described the design as one that was well planned and easy to execute and replicate. Lauren, a project-group teacher, said the following:

It is a good design. I think it will help the children, especially those with very low reading abilities. I noticed that some of my students from last year are not doing as well as last year when they were in Year 6; so, I am hoping they would catch up before falling too far back. Because I see them so often, I was able to pick up on this quickly, and now I can address the problem.

Caleb, another project-group teacher, perceived the Y7P positively:

Teaching here on the project is the same, but very different. I am obviously drawing on what I've done in primary school. With working with the children for four subjects, you get to know the ones who work, those who need help, and those with behavioural problems. The project helps us to recognise the problem early enough to do something about it.

Fourteen of the 16 Y7P teaching staff provided responses that contributed to the theme of *being organised*. These teaching staff members strongly emphasised the importance of being prepared to receive pupils when they transferred to secondary school and throughout their transition to secondary education. This view was held by all Y7P teachers, and it was clear that they supported the design of the project, along with its remit to address pupil requirements that are common during the transition to secondary schooling.

| No. | Group | Name | Category A – Preparedness |
|-----------------|-------|----------|---------------------------|
| 1 | PG 1 | Caleb | X |
| 2 | PG 2 | Nicole | X |
| 3 | PG 3 | Lauren | X |
| 4 | PG 4 | Verona | X |
| 5 | CG1 | Martha | X |
| 6 | CG2 | Rachel | X |
| 7 | CG3 | Lissa | X |
| 8 | CG4 | Toni | X |
| 9 | SEN1 | Carrie | X |
| 10 | TA1 | Zara | |
| 11 | TA2 | Ashleigh | X |
| 12 | TA3 | Annie | |
| 13 | TA4 | Kristen | X |
| 14 | TA5 | India | |
| 15 | TA6 | Ally | X |
| 16 | LM1 | Gabby | |
| 17 | DH | Holly | X |
| 18 | H | Fern | X |
| Total responses | | | 14 |

Table 7.2 teaching staff contributions to category A—a successful transition involves being well prepared (Note: The teaching staff are represented as follows: PG, project-group class teacher; CG, control-group class teacher; SEN, Special Needs Co-ordinator; TA, teaching assistant; LM, learning mentor; DH deputy head teacher; H, head teacher)

7.2.2 Category B: A Successful Transition Settles Pupils Quickly

Category B presents themes emerging from the teaching staff's perceptions regarding the purpose of a transition initiative and what is required to support pupils in settling into secondary school faster. Within this category, three themes emerged from the

semi-structured interviews with teaching staff: *support for pupil learning, academic and social development, and creating a familiar school environment.*

In order to be prepared to receive newly transferred pupils, all the class teachers agreed that there was a need to understand pupil development during the transition process. When asked about what the pupils needed during their first week of term, Caleb, one of the four project-group teachers, responded, 'Getting them into a routine as quickly as possible.' Similarly, India, a project-group teaching assistant, said, 'If you do not get them in a routine as quickly as possible, you will lose them, and they will not listen or show you the respect.' When asked what was meant by 'lose them', India replied, 'They will not settle or do well. They will play around and will not take school seriously.' While most class teachers shared this opinion, it opposes the argument put forward by Ward (2000), which is discussed below. At this stage of analysis, the class teachers seemed more concerned with pupils becoming involved in their academic work than with their social and psychological development.

7.2.2.i Support for pupil learning

The first theme that emerged from the teaching staff interviews regarded the importance of providing support for pupil learning. A primary role of teaching assistants was to provide additional support for the pupils in one of the project-group classes during all teaching sessions. One method of support involved withdrawing those pupils who were struggling with a particular subject from the classroom in order to support their work in small groups. In some cases, it was found that pupils with behavioural problems also required additional learning support. Caleb, a teacher from one of the project groups, explained:

In the first instance, teaching and learning is a two-way street. It is not only about the teacher and their techniques; it is about whether the students are actually, you know, listening and learning and taking in what you are saying. The teaching and learning experience should be that if the children still cannot access the lesson, there's got to be a problem somewhere, so I had to adapt my teaching style.

Another teacher, Verona, also from one of the project-group classes, shared her view:

Learning is not only the children's responsibility. We need to do our part and adapt the curriculum to accommodate and meet their needs. This is not easy, as some are more challenging and have more needs than others.

Teachers from the project groups were also presented with the opportunity of having smaller classes. Pupils who were identified as not being able to cope well with a particular subject were withdrawn, and they worked with the SENCO or a teaching assistant who provided opportunities to help them build confidence and who tailored the teaching techniques to meet their individual needs. The SENCO, Carrie, described the smaller group being withdrawn in terms of its function:

To help with the small group withdrawn from the main classroom, there are special-needs workers who work alongside me. This was because pupils with special needs and those with behavioural problems were able to be managed using small groups. Many of these pupils whom we pull out find it difficult to work in a whole-group situation and tend to disrupt. When they are placed in small groups, they work a lot better, and you can see immediate progress.

All teachers from the project group shared Carrie's perception, with one project-group teacher, Martha, saying the following:

The smaller group gives the pupils the opportunity to do more sharing and working one-to-one with the teaching assistants or SENCO. It also helps with those who have behaviour problems, as they are removed from the whole class, and it limits disruptions.

According to the vision of the deputy head and head teacher, the Y7P aimed to support pupils who were unable to access the curriculum and to offer additional support in the hope of easing their transition to secondary schooling. These pupils would be assigned to one of the four project-group classes. The head teacher, Fern, said the following:

The ability to access the curriculum and work independently was considered a characteristic that should determine those pupils assigned to the comparison group. Less able pupils should be assigned to one of the project group[s] of classes.

However, three participants, two class teachers, and the SENCO noted that the division of pupils was not even and not all the children who required support were placed in one of the project classes. To clarify, these teaching staff members meant that, in all Year 7 classes, there were some pupils with special educational needs who also required additional literacy support. They argued that if all these pupils were in the same classes, it would be more manageable for the team to meet their needs. Carrie, the SENCO, explained:

It is difficult to support those who have additional needs when they are on both sides of the project. If they were on one side, it would make it a whole lot easier.

When Carrie referred to 'both sides of the project', she meant both the project and comparison groups of classes. The SENCO went on to explain that, by dividing pupils into appropriate groups where they could obtain the support they required, the teaching assistants would be able to focus on those pupils that most required extra support. Carrie added the following:

Because the pupils with the most needs are not all in one room, we have to divide the team, and, sometimes, this is difficult because the team is small, and also, there is a lack of material resources.

This statement upheld the use of small groups to support those pupils who most required it. In addition, this arrangement would provide the class teacher with the opportunity to focus on the remaining pupils and thereby work within the remit of the Y7P by adding support; it was hoped that this would help, not only with the transition to secondary schooling, but also with the ultimate goal of raising literacy. However, a part of the aim was unmet because there were pupils in the comparison group who were not provided with additional help. When asked about this in end-of-year interview, the head teacher, Fern, shared that the senior management team wanted to do their best for all pupils; but they had so many of them with additional needs and only four classes that offered the additional support. Fern further mentioned, 'Some of the children with fewer problems were placed on the other side of the project' (in the comparison group).

Another teacher from the project group, Nicole, said the following:

I think pupils need to be settled as quickly as possible; but having too many pupils with learning problems or too many behavioural issues in one class is causing too much of a headache for individual staff. Having all of them together is just too much of a headache, and we've actually taken one child out and put him on the other side [one the comparison group of classes] to sort out his behaviour, and now he is settled.

In contrast to the strategy of removing pupils from the main classroom to receive extra support from the teaching staff, peer support was available from those in the project group who were more capable of accessing the curriculum. Teachers from the project group mentioned that they welcomed these more able pupils, who added a new

dimension to lessons and offered help to their peers who were struggling. Caleb, a project-group teacher, reported the following:

By having some more able pupils who can access the curriculum challenges me to work at a higher level to keep them interested in the work.

Lauren, another project-group teacher, concurred:

By having pupils who were more able, they can help those who are struggling and encourage them to work a little harder.

When discussing pupil ability, the three former primary-school project class teachers mentioned that the strength they brought to the Y7P was their ability to teach an array of subjects. However, these teachers also mentioned that, although they worked with some of the same pupils they had taught in primary school, they did not feel confident teaching at the secondary level. These teachers also thought that, over time, they would gain enough confidence and experience to place themselves on a par with the other secondary-school teachers. When asked about the ways they could contribute to the Y7P, there was a range of comments. Caleb, a project-group teacher, said the following:

I felt that I could contribute some experience of working with [former primary] school children, obviously not as much experience as some teachers; but I felt that my life skills would help as well.

This view was shared by Nicole, another project-group teacher:

I felt that, obviously, I can do that. And when I came in, I could set my room out to suit the needs of the children; rather than have them walking around the building to 14 different teachers, I could keep a tab on them. I should know

what their progress is – like the basics of English and maths – and hopefully move them on from that.

These statements align with the aim of the project, which was to help pupils who needed it the most by offering the support required to raise their literacy levels. Both Caleb and Nicole noted that their primary teaching experience provided them with the ability to work closely with their pupils in order to monitor their progress and identify where additional support was required.

7.2.2.i Academic and social development

The second theme in Category B – a successful transition settles pupils quickly – focused on the social development of Year 7 pupils during their transition year. An analysis of the teaching staff's interview data illustrated the various factors that impacted on a pupil's adjustment to secondary schooling. The staff interviewed commented that some pupils had expressed concern regarding making new friends, bullying, getting lost when moving from one class to the next and teacher expectations. The overriding view that emerged in this theme was the need to address the social factors that were faced by the newly transferred pupils. The transition process to secondary schooling was viewed by the teaching staff as the development of pupils' social maturity. For instance, Toni, a teacher from one of the comparison groups, offered the following response when asked why so much emphasis was placed on the transition to secondary schooling:

It is because it is a difficult time, and the pupils have to show a high level of maturity. They are expected to become very mature, make decisions and be responsible for all their lessons. Sometimes it is hard.

These views indicate that a successful transition is a holistic process that embraces both academic progress and social development. While these two areas are central to the holistic approach of aiding pupils in settling into secondary school, this section focuses on social development. At the beginning of the school year, there were differing views among the teachers and support staff regarding the importance of meeting the requirements of the whole child and the manner in which it affected a pupil's transition to secondary schooling. For instance, Lissa, a teacher from the comparison group, mentioned that, 'When pupils come to secondary school, our job is to teach and only address problems if they come up, but the focus is on teaching'. On the other hand, Caleb, from the project group, said, 'Our first thing is to get to know the children and then teach. By doing this, you can adjust the expectations for each child'.

One teacher from a project-group class, Nicole, explained:

The transition is not just moving from primary to secondary school. It goes beyond this, and we have to try and understand and remember how difficult it is to move from somewhere you are familiar with and to cope with all that is new around you.

This view was supported by Rachel, a teacher from the comparison group:

Transition is not an easy process. I think because we see it all the time that makes it easy for us, maybe, but not the children. We need to remember that many of the children are timid and a bit anxious and do not know many of the students. We are not only here to teach. I do a lot of pastoral care in the first few weeks of term.

It is interesting to note that the Y7P teachers seemed to place emphasis on academic as well as social development. For example, Caleb said, 'I was worried about a child I knew from primary school who did really well and was very sociable. Now, I noticed he had changed and was a bit withdrawn; so I had a word with him.' Project-group

teachers tended to view the Y7P as the context in which to provide the necessary tools for supporting pupil learning.

Some teaching staff who were interviewed expressed the same concerns articulated by the pupils regarding the anticipated difficulties associated with making new friends, bullying, getting lost and moving between classrooms, having different teachers and the change of status involved in the move from primary school. When asked whether they felt that some pupils experienced difficulties in respect to moving to secondary school and in terms of social development, the teachers and support staff offered varying responses. Verona, a project-group teacher, suggested the following:

Pupils entering secondary would worry a bit about the move. I think the main problem is that they go from being the biggest and the oldest in their primary school, and then they come to secondary school not knowing what to expect.

Martha, a comparison-group teacher, argued as follows:

They all looked very anxious on the first day. It was like they were in shock. Yes, like a culture shock.

The SENCO, Carrie, offered the following comment:

Some of the students, when they came in, looked very lost and confused and did not know what to do.

Other participants from the comparison group commented that the extent to which pupils settle into secondary schooling is related to personality and maturity. The three teachers from the primary school specially mentioned the age of pupils transferring from primary school as a factor in their adjustment. They noted that, while most teachers were of the opinion that primary school pupils are old enough and sufficiently prepared to move to secondary schooling, there were some who considered the move extremely difficult. Lauren, a project-group teacher, offered the following remark:

One of my pupils from primary has changed so much since coming to secondary school, I hardly recognise him, as his behaviour changed. He is not as outgoing and seems more withdrawn and shy.

This observation is supported by Hirsch and Rapkin (1987) and Lawrence (2006) , who argue that the onset of adolescence is closely linked with psychological, cognitive, social and environmental changes. In the present study, the teaching staff generally considered the difficulties related to transition to be connected to a lack of confidence on the part of the pupil.

While the teaching staff agreed that settling-in was important, their perception of the concept varied. Lauren, a project-group teacher, mentioned that the skills acquired at primary school had proved to be the best tools:

I'm obviously drawing on what I've done in primary, but funnily enough, one of the things that you would notice in primary is the way the classroom is set out; they have been given little books, drawers for their books, which are kept here. I very much go on the primary ethos about positive behaviour management and rewarding children for good behaviour, which may seem a little bit primary-school like. If it was a Year 8 or 9 class, they would find that slightly childish. But I carried that on in this Year 7 class.

Martha, from the comparison group, defined *settling into secondary school* as 'a part of their development and maturity'. One of her colleagues, Lissa, maintained, 'Pupils know what to expect when they move to secondary school, and they normally just get on with it.' This perception highlights that some Y7P teachers were not fully aware of some of the anxieties pupils face in the first few months at secondary school.

7.2.2.ii Creating a familiar school environment

Another theme related to this category of understanding the settling-in process is that of creating a familiar school environment. According to earlier research, environmental familiarity contributes to the success of the transition (Ferguson 1998). The teaching staff in the current study placed great emphasis on the importance of the classroom environment. All of the teaching staff agreed that once pupils are comfortable in their surroundings, they tend to be more relaxed, which, in turn, leads to improvements to their learning. While explaining the importance of creating a familiar environment, the teaching staff focused on the best ways of helping pupils settle into secondary schooling and raising their literacy levels. Evidence from the current study suggests that the idea of a familiar environment as a component of the settling process is paramount. One teaching assistant, Kristen, argued, 'For pupils to settle, they need a comfortable environment. They are coming from primary school, where they know the school very well, to a bigger school with a lot of expectations.'

Another aspect of the new pupil environment focused on adapting to the changes in the physical setting after the move from primary school. Leaving primary school, a place that was familiar to these pupils, and moving to somewhere new and unfamiliar can prove to be daunting. The secondary school is bigger, and pupils are expected to navigate the premises in order to find the correct rooms. Verona, a teacher from one of the project groups of classes, referred to the new environment as 'a challenge to manage'. She added the following:

While settling into a comfortable environment was a challenge for most pupils, because of learning difficulties and behaviour problems, other measures had to be put in place to ensure that the work environment was conducive to learning for pupils in the project classes.

Lauren, another teacher from the project group, reported, ‘While the environment is a positive one that caters for learning, there are still the main problems of learning difficulties coupled with behavioural problems.’

From the discussion of settling newly transferred pupils, the teaching staff unanimously agreed that the Y7P had assisted in supporting these pupils (see Table 7.3).

| No. | Group | Name | Category B – Settling pupils quickly |
|-----------------|-------|----------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | PG 1 | Caleb | X |
| 2 | PG 2 | Nicole | X |
| 3 | PG 3 | Lauren | X |
| 4 | PG 4 | Verona | X |
| 5 | CG1 | Martha | X |
| 6 | CG2 | Rachel | X |
| 7 | CG3 | Lissa | X |
| 8 | CG4 | Toni | X |
| 9 | SEN1 | Carrie | X |
| 10 | TA1 | Zara | X |
| 11 | TA2 | Ashleigh | X |
| 12 | TA3 | Annie | X |
| 13 | TA4 | Kristen | X |
| 14 | TA5 | India | X |
| 15 | TA6 | Ally | X |
| 16 | LM1 | Gabby | X |
| 17 | DH | Holly | X |
| 18 | H | Fern | X |
| Total responses | | | 18 |

Table 7.3 teaching staff contributing to category B – a successful transition settles pupils quickly
(Note: The teaching staff are represented as follows: PG, project-group class teacher; CG, control-group class teacher; SEN, Special Needs Co-ordinator; TA, teaching assistant; LM, learning mentor; DH deputy head teacher; H, head teacher)

7.3 Initial Perceptions of the Year 7 Project Transition Initiative

Table 7.4 highlights two categories of perception – Category A, preparedness, and Category B, settling into secondary school – to which all the teaching staff contributed at the beginning of the academic year. This table reveals the participants who contributed to each category but does not show how many times they contributed. As discussed earlier (see Chapter 5), phenomenography is not concerned with how many times the perceptions of an individual are captured in a category, but rather how

their perceptions changed after engaging with a phenomenon – in this study, the Y7P. It is important to note that not all participants contributed to the first category of preparedness. This meant that, while analysing the interview transcripts, nothing was mentioned that could be added to any of the emerging themes. However, all participants made at least one contribution to Category B, settling into secondary school. This difference in contribution between the categories stems from the fact that all of the teachers, the teaching staff and the deputy and head teachers focused most of their responses on settling pupils first and then tailoring lessons second. This does not mean that the pupils were not working from the first day, but rather that the teachers understood the need for the pupils to be settled in order for them to produce work at a secondary-school level.

| No. | Group | Name | Category A – Preparedness | Category B – Settling in |
|-----------------|-------|----------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | PG 1 | Caleb | X | X |
| 2 | PG 2 | Nicole | X | X |
| 3 | PG 3 | Lauren | X | X |
| 4 | PG 4 | Verona | X | X |
| 5 | CG1 | Martha | X | X |
| 6 | CG2 | Rachel | X | X |
| 7 | CG3 | Lissa | X | X |
| 8 | CG4 | Toni | X | X |
| 9 | SEN1 | Carrie | X | X |
| 10 | TA1 | Zara | | X |
| 11 | TA2 | Ashleigh | X | X |
| 12 | TA3 | Annie | | X |
| 13 | TA4 | Kristen | X | X |
| 14 | TA5 | India | | X |
| 15 | TA6 | Ally | X | X |
| 16 | LM1 | Gabby | | X |
| 17 | DH | Holly | X | X |
| 18 | H | Fern | X | X |
| Total responses | | | 14 | 18 |

Table 7.4 classification of transition perceptions held by the teaching staff at the beginning of the academic year

(Note: The teaching staff are represented as follows: PG, project-group class teacher; CG, control-group class teacher; SEN, Special Needs Co-ordinator; TA, teaching assistant; LM, learning mentor; DH deputy head teacher; H, head teacher)

The perceptions held by the teachers, support staff and deputy and head teachers proved challenging to categorise at the early stages of analysis, mainly because the teaching staff often referred to more than one perception concurrently while

responding to a particular question. For instance, when asked about preparation for secondary school, Caleb, a project group teacher, said the following:

Yes, we had to prepare to receive the children. We made sure that they had lockers and other resources. But when they came in, we had to identify immediately those with behavioural problems.

Another analytical challenge that arose during the examination of the data occurred when the themes emerging through the perceptions were not mutually exclusive or independent of each other. For instance, Caleb, Nicole, Lauren and Verona were particularly vocal about their perception regarding the project and its impact on pupils' learning. Their collective perspective of the organisation and design of the Y7P was positive, and they all felt it was a useful initiative to support newly transferred pupils. However, Caleb believed that other aspects of the project could have involved more teacher input, for example, planning and setting boundaries for pupils with behavioural problems. Caleb also reported: 'There was a lot of pressure to meet the needs of all pupils at different levels, but once the initial hard work is put in, then they [pupils] settle quickly'. Through further probing, Caleb clarified what was entailed by 'initial hard work': 'On the first few days when the children come into class, you need to set boundaries and try to get to know them. You have to be nice but firm, so that they will get to know you and you can get to know them as well'.

Although Toni and Rachel, both teachers from the comparison group, and Carrie, the SENCO, shared perceptions regarding the two categories, there was a clear variation in their beliefs associated with the areas that the Y7P transition initiative should address. For example, Toni rejected the notion of settling-in as a separate perception, but recognised it to address the academic and social needs of pupils. However, Rachel, a comparison-group teacher, said the following:

With all the pressure we have to get them to right levels, you forget sometimes to think about their other needs. Also, the idea of the project is a good one to help pupils get used slowly to the idea of changing classes for each subject, but I think they will have to face it in Year 8. It is only delaying the inevitable.

Carrie, the SENCO, added the following:

In the first few weeks, you see them for such a short time, it is difficult to get to know them and find out if they are settled or have any problems. But after a few weeks, you can tell those who are still struggling to find their classes or need help with their class work. That is where we come in, to support the class teacher with small groups.

Overall, by the end of the academic year, the teaching staff participating in the Y7P had mostly positive reviews and were looking forward to the second year to implement all that they had learnt. The teachers from the project group of classes also acknowledged that working closely with the same pupils every day at secondary school had provided them with new insights into pupil needs, as well as new ways to support those who required it the most.

7.4 Perceptions of Teaching Staff at the End of the Year

The second round of individual interviews was held in the last month of the academic year. The information collected from the teaching and support staff, along with the deputy and head teachers, focused on the perceptions of transition and the manner in which the Y7P had affected pupil achievement by the end of the academic year. Table 7.5 lists the categories and emerging themes, along with the number of teaching staff members contributing to each category.

| Category | Themes emerging | Number of teaching staff contributions N=18 |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| A (Being well prepared) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receiving newly transferred pupils | 4 |

| | | |
|---|--|----|
| B (Settling in) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social development (making friends) | 4 |
| C (Supports learning) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition initiative and pupil learning • Small groups | 13 |
| D (Supports transition success) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of teaching and support staff • Support for teachers working as part of the Year 7 Project | 15 |

Table 7.5 classification of themes emerging from teaching staff at the end of the year (Source: Analysis of end-of-year interview data with teaching staff)

As seen so far in this section, the two initial categories remained, and two new categories emerged in the interview data from the end of the year. These new categories are referred to as Category C, supports learning, and Category D, supports transition success. In both new categories, the teaching staff mentioned the importance of addressing the requirements of the whole child in order to support pupils in their first year of secondary schooling. The responses in Categories C and D account for over half the total number of themes that emerged during the interviews. The categories with the fewest responses were A, preparedness, and B, settling into secondary school, wherein only two of the earlier themes were mentioned. The four categories of teaching staff perceptions are presented below.

Category A: A successful transition involves being well prepared: A successful transition initiative involves being well prepared to receive pupils through organisation and a good design that facilitates learning at the beginning of the year.

Category B: A successful transition settles pupils quickly: A successful transition initiative provides opportunities that encourage learning and facilitate settling into a new environment.

Category C: Transition initiative supports learning: A transition initiative supports the learning of newly transferred pupils.

Category D: Transition initiative supports transition success: A transition initiative provides additional support from the teaching staff during the first year

of secondary school.

The two new categories of perception that were developed over the course of the academic year focused on the impact of the transition process on pupil learning and support for transition success. During the interviews at the end of the year, the teaching staff discussed a wider range of transition issues and commented on how pupils were adjusting or not adjusting to the new school environment. One main aspect of the final interview highlighted how the perceptions of some staff shifted in terms of understanding their roles in the transition to secondary school and the roles of pupils.

7.4.1 Category A: Transition Initiative Involves Being Well Prepared

The perception of preparedness represents the broad aims of the Y7P, which were to prepare and support pupils through the transition period. The teaching staff realised that the first step in helping pupils was to ensure their own readiness to receive them at the beginning of the academic year. An analysis of the interview data revealed that a majority of the teaching staff contributed to this category in the beginning, but only four made a contribution at the end of the year. Tables 7.6 and 7.7 show the contributions to Category A at the beginning and end of the year.

| Category | Themes emerging | Number of teaching staff contributions N=18 |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| A (Being well prepared) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being organised | 14 |

Table 7.6 theme emerging at the beginning of the year that contributes to category A – being well prepared

| Category | Themes emerging | Number of teaching staff contributions N=18 |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| A (Being well prepared) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being organised | 4 |

Table 7.7 theme emerging at the end of the year that contributes to category A – Being well prepared

During the interviews at the end of the year, the class teachers agreed that pupil

preparedness for secondary schooling was the responsibility of both the pupils and the teaching staff. They also noted that, if they, as teachers, were not prepared or sufficiently organised to receive pupils when they arrived, and if the necessary protocols were not in place, then pupil outcomes were likely to be negative. Three of the project-group teachers, Lauren, Nicole and Caleb, however, all agreed that they had not realised how difficult the actual transition was for pupils or the level of organisation that was required to receive them both as a cohort and as individuals with specific needs. Nicole, a project-group teacher, stated the following:

When [X] was in primary school, he was really well behaved; but now he is in secondary school, he is a different child.

When asked to explain, Nicole adding the following:

In primary school, [X] was really quiet and got on with his work. He was a bit shorter than the other boys, and they teased him sometimes. Now, he is not as engaged with his work, and his behaviour is not as good as in primary.

In end-of-year interviews, three of the four teachers from the project classes mentioned explicitly the importance of being prepared to receive newly transferred pupils. Interestingly, only the former primary school teachers commented on the preparation for secondary school, a situation that could be due to at least two reasons. An analysis of end-of-year data revealed that most of the responses focused on academic pupil progress and all that had transpired during the year to support this. The participants contributing to Category A at the end of the year did so by reflecting on the transition process and discussing ways to make the transition easier for pupils. The former primary school teachers, Caleb, Nicole and Lauren, emphasised the importance of the Y7P design in relation to pupil learning and quick settling. In addition to the transition for pupils moving to secondary school being well prepared and the teaching staff being organised to receive the newly transferred pupils, one teacher from the comparison group of classes discussed the idea of a 'delayed'

transition and the negative effects it might have on pupils in Year 8. Rachel suggested, 'While we need to be organised to receive the new pupils in the project, they may encounter transition issues, such as anxieties [and] coping with changing rooms for each subjects in Year 8.' Table 7.8 identifies the four teaching staff members who contributed to the category of preparedness.

| No. | Group | Name | Category A Preparedness |
|-------|-------|----------|-------------------------|
| 1 | PG 1 | Caleb | X |
| 2 | PG2 | Nicole | X |
| 3 | PG3 | Lauren | X |
| 4 | PG4 | Verona | |
| 5 | CG1 | Martha | |
| 6 | CG2 | Rachel | X |
| 7 | CG3 | Lissa | |
| 8 | CG4 | Toni | |
| 9 | SEN1 | Carrie | |
| 10 | TA1 | Zara | |
| 11 | TA2 | Ashleigh | |
| 12 | TA3 | Annie | |
| 13 | TA4 | Kristen | |
| 14 | TA5 | India | |
| 15 | TA6 | Ally | |
| 16 | LM1 | Gabby | |
| 17 | DH | Holly | |
| 18 | H | Fern | |
| Total | | | 4 |

Table7.8 contribution of teaching staff to category A – being well prepared
 (Note: The teaching staff are represented as follows: PG, project-group class teacher; CG, control-group class teacher; SEN, Special Needs Co-ordinator; TA, teaching assistant; LM, learning mentor; DH, deputy head teacher; H, head teacher)

The teachers who contributed to this category generally felt that being organised and prepared for the newly transferred pupils confirmed their earlier thoughts and beliefs, including the perception that the project would support pupil learning. The Y7P also highlighted new aspects of the transition process such that, by the end of the year, the teaching staff's knowledge of pupils' needs had expanded. For example, the teaching staff articulated that pupils would likely benefit from experiencing an organised class and that they required continuous support from their teachers.

7.4.2 Category B: Transition Initiative Helps Pupils Settle

The themes related to the manner in which the Y7P transition initiative supported pupils and assisted them in settling into their new environment were placed in Category B. The teachers pointed out in their beginning-of-year interviews that, prior to the pupils settling, they were required to adjust to their new environment, engage with a new learning regime and make new friends. Transition is a critical stage in the lives of pupils, as they face a myriad of changes. This view is supported by (McGhee, Ward et al. 2003; Evangelou 2008; Hanewald 2013), who argued that the transition process affects the whole child academically, emotionally, socially and psychologically. They further add that, in order for pupils to make a good transition, they must be comfortable in each of these areas. Table 7.9 presents the themes that emerged to form Category B at the beginning and end of the year, and Table 7.10 illustrates the recurring theme that emerged at the end of the year.

| Category | Themes emerging | Number of teaching staff contributions N=18 |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| B (Settling in) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for pupil learning • Social development • Creating a familiar environment | 18 |

Table 7.9 themes emerging at the beginning of the year that contribute to category B—settling in

| Category | Themes emerging | Number of teaching staff contributions N=18 |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| B (Settling in) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social development (making friends) | 4 |

Table 7.10 theme emerging at the end of the year that contributes to category A
– Being well prepared

Chapter 2 highlighted a number of issues that have an impact on whether pupils settle into their new environment and how long this process takes. The findings of the current study concur with some of those factors, such as adjusting to the environment,

teacher-pupil relationships, peer relations, self-esteem and self-confidence. For instance, Caleb, a teacher from a project group of classes, suggested the following:

If we try to understand all that the children have to get used to when they come to secondary school, then we can make it a little easier for them. That is why I am using my experience from primary to help them settle down.

Nicole, another project-group teacher, highlighted, 'Children must be comfortable to learn.' These sentiments highlight the aim of the Y7P, as emphasised by Fern, the head teacher:

We need to help pupils settle down as quickly as possible to begin the learning process. The project intends to help pupils settle quickly, as they will have one teacher for four subjects. This will help the teachers identify early any problems and then help the pupil to sort it out.

At the beginning of the year, 18 responses from 16 teaching staff and the deputy and head teachers were assigned to Category B. However, at the end of the year, only four responses were classified within this perception. One possible reason for this decline is that, upon reflection over the course of the year, the teaching staff had the opportunity to think about the transition process and offer other suggestions that might have been instrumental in helping a greater number of pupils make the transition more smoothly.

During the interview, the teaching staff reflected on the settling-in experiences of newly transferred pupils and the factors contributing to sustained difficulties. Difficulties in settling into the new school were also seen as relating to a pupil's personality and behavioural difficulties. The myth about bullying was identified as one of the most serious issues affecting adjustment to a new school. Nicole, a project-group teacher, commented about the newly transferred pupils:

Some of them would find it easy enough in the second term, but the issues around the bullying and that sort of stuff could go on until the second term or the next year. This is why we try to sort things like this out quickly.

Another teacher, Caleb, again from a project group, said the following:

Having initiatives and support in place like we have here in the Year 7 Project means that we can target those pupils in particular and address the problem immediately.

7.4.2.i Social development – making friends

The teaching staff considered developing friendships to be crucial to settling into secondary school. In the interviews, three project-group teachers, Caleb, Nicole and Verona, mentioned that at the start of year, they had ascertained from the pupils whether any members of the Year 7 cohort were from the same primary school. While few pupils from the same primary school were in the same class, these three teachers asserted that having older siblings or friends in the school did help with the settling-in process. For instance, one of the project-group teachers, Verona, said the following:

I think it is important for children to make new friends. But in the first few weeks, they can team up with children they know, and then I switch up the groups so that they can work with other children.

However, some teachers also pointed out that some pupils did not know anyone in the school and needed to make friends. The impact of falling in and out of friendships, teachers reported, could have serious effects on pupils, especially girls, as previous research findings have uncovered (O'Brien 2001). Teachers also attested that introverted and quiet pupils were likely to find it more difficult to establish themselves in a new friendship group. Caleb, a project-group teacher, said the following:

Making new friends is really difficult for some pupils, so you help by putting them into groups to work together. If you ask them to get themselves into a group, they tend to go with the same children, leaving out those who are quiet and shy.

He added, 'Making friends is considered more difficult for pupils with learning difficulties'. This was the case with many newly transferred pupils, especially in the project group of classes. Verona, a teacher from the project group, said the following:

Pupils' attitudes and personalities are very important. The ones who are more confident will find the transition easier. I found the pupils who show more energy seem to settle more quickly and also form friendships a lot quicker in comparison to the more introverted pupils. Those who are quieter will take more time and might feel that they are a bit of an outsider.

Teachers contributing to this category share similar views on friendship and relationships and agree that this aspect of the pupils' development is important for pupils transitioning and settling into secondary schooling.

| No. | Group | Name | Category B – Settling |
|-------|-------|----------|-----------------------|
| 1 | PG 1 | Caleb | X |
| 2 | PG2 | Nicole | X |
| 3 | PG3 | Lauren | |
| 4 | PG4 | Verona | X |
| 5 | CG1 | Martha | |
| 6 | CG2 | Rachel | |
| 7 | CG3 | Lissa | |
| 8 | CG4 | Toni | |
| 9 | SEN1 | Carrie | |
| 10 | TA1 | Zara | |
| 11 | TA2 | Ashleigh | |
| 12 | TA3 | Annie | |
| 13 | TA4 | Kristen | |
| 14 | TA5 | India | |
| 15 | TA6 | Ally | |
| 16 | LM1 | Gabby | |
| 17 | DH | Holly | |
| 18 | H | Fern | X |
| Total | | | 4 |

Table 7.11 teaching staff contribution to category B—a successful transition settles pupils quickly (Note: The teaching staff are represented as follows: PG, project-group class teacher; CG, control-group class teacher; SEN, Special Needs Co-ordinator; TA, teaching assistant; LM, learning mentor; DH deputy head teacher; H, head teacher)

During the second round of interviews at the end of the year, the teaching staff – mainly the project teachers – were more open when expressing how they thought pupils felt and exhibited a greater understanding of what was being experienced by the pupils during their transition to secondary schooling.

7.4.3 Category C: Supports Learning

Category C details the themes that emerged regarding the perception that the Y7P transition initiative supports learning. This perception emerged as a new and important category during end-of-year interviews, along with Category D (see Table 7.5). An analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that all teachers who contributed to Category C declared that they had seen a difference in pupils' attitudes towards work between the beginning and end of the academic year. The teachers also mentioned that learning occurred when the pupils were relaxed and understood the work and what was expected of them.

7. 4.3.i Transition initiative and pupil learning

The overriding theme in Category C relates to teacher perceptions of the transition initiative and its impact on pupil learning. Teachers considered having a thorough knowledge of the transition from primary to secondary schooling to be essential if they were to perform their professional duties in the capacity of passing on curriculum knowledge while working as a part of the Y7P. Knowledge of the transition initiative was especially important for teaching the project-group's literacy lessons. Within the theme of supporting learning, aspects of the curriculum and its accessibility to pupils formed the key features. When explaining the importance of accessing the curriculum to support learning, participants focused on the manner in which this affected pupils

academically. For example, Lauren, a teacher from a project group of classes, said, 'The children in the project classes with lower abilities needed support with the curriculum, as they were not able to access it on entry. Now, they have shown good improvement.' All of the teaching staff who made contributions to Category C mentioned that, by improving their literacy skills, the pupils were able to facilitate learning more effectively.

Teachers, generally from the project group, emphasised that the Y7P transition initiative supported pupil learning and development. All of the teaching staff working with the project had positive reviews of its purpose and aims. They agreed that the design had helped pupils become familiar with the new environment and understand their responsibilities at secondary school. However, while all of the teachers agreed that the project was a positive initiative in terms of supporting newly transferred pupils, they identified a few areas of the Y7P design that required revisiting. For example, Caleb, a project-group class teacher, reported that the provision of more resources and on-going training would have aided them in supporting pupils to a greater extent. This view was shared by another project-group teacher, Lauren:

While we gave it a good shot, it was hard working with the majority of children with learning or behavioural difficulties. It makes learning more difficult, and we, as teachers, are forced to be creative. I guess this is where my primary training experience was used.

Ashleigh, a teaching assistant, supported the views of the teachers by adding, 'If the project continues, more children can get the support they need, and their behaviour will improve. Many of them act up because they can't understand the work, but with small group sessions, it helps.' With this knowledge, another theme emerged that supported pupils' learning – using smaller teaching groups led by the classroom assistants and the SENCO teacher.

7.4.3.ii Smaller teaching groups

The smaller teaching groups were withdrawn from the main classrooms and moved to another room, which was also smaller. These pupils, who required extra help, were usually identified by the main class teacher as falling behind, struggling to work in a large class setting or being disruptive. The teachers and teaching staff found that withdrawing to smaller teaching groups helped pupils in numerous ways.

The second theme in Category C focused on the strategy of incorporating the use of small teaching groups, whereby pupils who required additional support during lessons were withdrawn from the main classroom and taught by teaching assistants. This strategy was mainly used by those in the project group. One of the main aspects of the Y7P was the opportunity to provide smaller groups with more focused support. The small groups offered pupils who were finding it difficult to work in a whole class situation the opportunity to help build their confidence and experience teaching that was tailored to meet their needs. One project-group teacher, Caleb, noted the following:

The smaller group gives the pupils the opportunity to do more sharing and working one-to-one with the teaching assistants or SEN Co-ordinator worker. It also helps with those who have behaviour problems, as they are removed from the whole class, and it limits disruptions.

This was not only the view of the class teachers, but also that of the teaching assistants and the learning mentor. Both Ally, a teaching assistant, and Gabby, the learning mentor, highlighted the need to support the pupils with behavioural issues when entering secondary school. Gabby said, 'This year, we have seen more children with behavioural problems and statements than last year. It is our job to help them settle in and work on their behaviours.'

Both the teachers and teaching staff emphasised that a smooth transition supports learning, and they reported changes in the pupils' attitudes by the end of the academic year. The teaching staff also found that their attitudes towards school and their position within school at the beginning of the academic year were indicative of their attitudes at the end of the first year. They reported that pupils who were positive and exhibited confidence at the beginning of the year were more confident, involved in clubs and organisations and were overall more settled at the end of the year. The teaching staff concluded that a positive pupil attitude is one of the main contributors to a successful transition.

Upon reflection at the end of the year, three of the four project-group class teachers mentioned their commitment to learning as a lifelong process. They agreed with the idea that if pupils experience difficulty in making the transition to secondary schooling, there is a likelihood that their learning progress in Year 7 may be hindered, which may also affect them in the future. Therefore, it is important to ensure that pupils settle as soon as possible after the move to secondary school. In the Y7P, settling-in was achieved through close monitoring and continuous support where required. The head and deputy head teacher alluded to this in end-of-year interview. Fern, the head teacher, said the following:

Once pupils settle in, the learning process starts, and, with the close monitoring of pupils, teachers can detect early problems and address them right away.

The deputy head teacher, Holly, made the following claim:

This is what the project is about. We identify the problem early, and we can address the problems and find the right solutions for the child.

All four project-group teachers shared this view and asserted that, by seeing pupils for thirteen 45-minute periods a week, they would obtain a better understanding of their needs and thus be able to effectively offer the appropriate support during the pupils' transition to secondary schooling. Table 7.12 highlights all those members of the teaching staff who made contributions to Category C – transition initiative supports learning.

| No. | Group | Name | Category C – Supports Learning |
|-------|-------|----------|--------------------------------|
| 1 | PG 1 | Caleb | X |
| 2 | PG2 | Nicole | |
| 3 | PG3 | Lauren | X |
| 4 | PG4 | Verona | X |
| 5 | CG1 | Martha | X |
| 6 | CG2 | Rachel | X |
| 7 | CG3 | Lissa | X |
| 8 | CG4 | Toni | X |
| 9 | SEN1 | Carrie | X |
| 10 | TA1 | Zara | X |
| 11 | TA2 | Ashleigh | |
| 12 | TA3 | Annie | X |
| 13 | TA4 | Kristen | |
| 14 | TA5 | India | X |
| 15 | TA6 | Ally | X |
| 16 | LM1 | Gabby | X |
| 17 | DH | Holly | |
| 18 | H | Fern | |
| Total | | | 13 |

Table 7.12 teaching staff contributions to category c– transition initiative supports learning

(Note: The teaching staff are represented as follows: PG, project-group class teacher; CG, control-group class teacher; SEN, Special Needs Co-ordinator; TA, teaching assistant; LM, learning mentor; DH deputy head teacher; H, head teacher)

Table 7.12 highlights the contributions made to Category C and puts into perspective the manner in which the teaching staff viewed the impact of the transition initiative on pupil learning. Teachers emphasised that, in the first instance, in order for learning to take place, the pupils are required to be in a relaxed and comfortable environment. The teachers then shared their perception regarding the use of small groups to

enhance the learning experience for pupils who found it challenging to work in the whole-class scenario.

7.4.4 Category D: Transition Initiative Supports Transition Success

The teaching staff's perception of supporting the successful transition of pupils emerged as a new category at the end of the year, with 11 participants contributing their thoughts on the topic (see Table 7.13). This perception is underpinned by the necessity for the teaching staff and the deputy and head teachers to focus on holistic pupil needs, rather than purely academic needs. The teaching staff tended to view the Y7P transition initiative as a step towards supporting pupil learning and as a means of easing issues associated with the transition to secondary schooling. Caleb, a teacher from the project group, reported, 'The aim of the project is to support those who need it most and to give them the best chance of doing well'. The teaching staff went beyond their initial response of seeing the project as a safe place to become aware of their own role in ensuring that pupils achieve a successful transition.

7.4.4.i Role of the teaching staff within the Year 7 Project

The first theme that emerged in Category D (see Table 7.5) arose from the teaching staff's end-of-year reflections regarding their own role through the course of the Y7P. The theme of transition success for newly transferred pupils constitutes a collection of thoughts that the teaching staff articulated when discussing their perceptions regarding how they had come to realise and value the importance of the support they provide and the impact it has on pupil learning and attitudes towards school.

One comparison-group teacher, Martha, critiqued the initiative, arguing, 'While the idea of the Year 7 Project was admirable, the design should have incorporated input

from the teachers with the responsibility for facilitating this transition initiative.’ When asked for clarification, Martha added, ‘Although I am not teaching one of the project classes, it would have been good to have the opportunity to discuss what could be done to support pupils coming to secondary school. There are some children in the other classes [control classes] who also need help.’

By the time end-of-year interviews were conducted, class teachers from both the project and comparison groups no longer viewed learning as a one-way transmission of information from teacher to pupil. Rather, teachers saw learning as a continuous dialogue between pupil and teacher that leads to personal, academic and transition success. Lauren, a project-group teacher, emphasised, ‘Working as part of the project opened ways for learning for me and the children. I got to know them and their needs, and they got to know me.’ Zara, a project-group teaching assistant, shared this idea and demonstrated a more sophisticated understanding of the learning process, explaining, ‘Learning is in stages, and we need to support them [the pupils] at all levels, using all our skills.’ India, another project-group teaching assistant, reported, ‘In order to support learning during the transition period, I look for new ways to help them; sometimes, I find an activity and I think, “Which child could benefit from this?” or “Where and when can I use this in one-to-one to help them?”’ Annie, the third project-group teaching assistant, added, ‘My role is to help with the small groups, and by doing this, I can get to know the children and find out where the problem is and help them with their lesson’.

The theme of the role of the teaching staff within the perception of exploring transition success is a broad area. This perception, which considers issues around transition from both the teaching and learning perspectives, as relayed by the teaching staff, reveals a range of thoughts. For example, when the teaching staff was asked about the instigation of the Y7P as an intervention for pupils whom they felt required support

and about the success of this initiative, nearly all members responded positively and in alignment with the aim of the project. However, their sentiments were sometimes expressed with some reservation. The teachers, mainly from the project group of classes, reported that there were several areas of the Y7P that required improvement, despite the intention being positive. In particular, it was argued that the design required restructuring in relation to redistributing pupils with behavioural problems throughout the Year 7 classes. Lauren, a project-group teacher, reported, 'Dealing with so many children with behavioural problems is so challenging at times. It's like, once one child starts, they all begin to misbehave.' When asked for a possible solution, Lauren added, 'I'm not sure, because there are so many with behavioural problems, and those who need extra help are placed in small groups, and I'm not sure that is the best idea. They act out and then are taken out of the class.' Second, Caleb, another project-group teacher, referred to the revised curriculum for the project-group pupils: 'By taking away the Modern Foreign Languages to add more literacy is a good idea on paper, but, in principle, they will have one year less of learning another language.' When asked for a possible solution, he added, 'We can teach some aspect of literacy in all of our lessons for a few minutes.'

Overall, the teachers from both the project and the comparison groups of classes agreed that they have an important role to play in the Y7P – first, by trying to understand the needs of the pupils, and second, by addressing these needs as quickly as possible.

7.4.4.ii Support for the teaching staff within the project

The analysis of the interview data at the end of the year revealed that the teaching staff generally emphasised the links between the support that is usually provided within the school structure and that which was offered by the Y7P. Lauren, a project-

group teacher, mentioned, 'We were kinda supported, but from within the team.' Another project-group teacher, Caleb, reported, 'There wasn't enough support provided from outside the project, and staff had made many decisions in relation to teaching and issues with children themselves.'

The notion of support was the biggest contention among the teachers in the project groups. They were concerned about the lack of support they had and the fact that there was no one in place to obtain answers to the questions that arose on a daily basis. One project-group teacher, Caleb, went on to argue, 'This is the first time the project is running, and there are so many things that came up that we did not know what to do.' When asked to explain, he said, 'For example, when you have a class, and a child is acting up, do you take them out or send them out to work in small groups? Or what happens when they get to Year 8? Will they have problems with organising themselves?'

Teachers within the project group of classes also reported that they received support from each other and during their staff meetings. Lauren said, 'This is the first time for the project, and there are some uncertainties, and we do not have all the answers; but we try to support each other. We have a weekly meeting and talk about issues that arise during a lesson.'

| No. | Group | Name | Category D Supports transition success |
|-------|-------|----------|--|
| 1 | PG 1 | Caleb | X |
| 2 | PG2 | Nicole | X |
| 3 | PG3 | Lauren | X |
| 4 | PG4 | Verona | X |
| 5 | CG1 | Martha | X |
| 6 | CG2 | Rachel | X |
| 7 | CG3 | Lissa | X |
| 8 | CG4 | Toni | X |
| 9 | SEN1 | Carrie | |
| 10 | TA1 | Zara | X |
| 11 | TA2 | Ashleigh | X |
| 12 | TA3 | Annie | X |
| 13 | TA4 | Kristen | X |
| 14 | TA5 | India | X |
| 15 | TA6 | Ally | |
| 16 | LM1 | Gabby | X |
| 17 | DH | Holly | X |
| 18 | H | Fern | |
| Total | | | 15 |

Table 7.13 teaching staff contributions to category D – supports transition success

(Note: The teaching staff are represented as follows: PG, project-group class teacher; CG, control-group class teacher; SEN, Special Needs Co-ordinator; TA, teaching assistant; LM, learning mentor; DH deputy head teacher; H, head teacher)

Table 7.13 identifies the participants who contributed to Category D, which discussed themes related to transition success for Year 7 pupils. The two themes within this category, the roles of teaching staff and support for the teachers, raised issues for the teaching staff regarding their position within the Y7P and the manner in which they could support pupils who are making the transition to secondary schooling.

7.5 Analysis of Perceptions of Transition and Pupil Learning

Table 7.14 shows that the teaching staff participants held a variety of perceptions regarding transition and pupil learning across all four categories before, during and at the end of Year 7. This range of perceptions indicates that most participants continued to hold multiple perceptions of both transition and its impact on pupil learning. With regard to the phenomenon of transition, it is possible for an individual

participant to have various interpretations and understandings that may co-exist and operate based on the specific situation. It is also possible for a participant to hold one perception at the beginning of the year and another at the end.

For instance, while all of the teachers in the project group of classes contributed to each of the categories identified at the end of the year, Caleb stood out, mainly because he was extremely vocal and had the longest interview. However, it was also because of his passion for encouraging learning among pupils. Caleb, a very vocal participant, shared his views on all four categories. In his discussion, he was the only participant who was able to link transition and learning to all four of the categories that emerged (see Table 7.14). This suggests that, with regard to the phenomena of transition and learning, an individual can possess multiple perceptions simultaneously. Caleb provides an example of an individual who may have various interpretations and understandings that coincide with the experience of the specific phenomenon, which, in this study, is the transition to secondary schooling.

This study shows that Categories C and D, supports learning and supports transition success, respectively, reflect the ideas and understandings that emerged from the in-depth discussion of the transition process, where learning and transition are viewed as holistic and not individual entities. The participant views indicate that the transition process of moving to secondary school correlates with various factors, including integrating with the new environment; adapting to the new teaching and learning methods and experiencing physical, mental, emotional and psychological development. These new insights emerged at the end of the year, and a majority of the teaching staff participants concluded that if these factors were all to be addressed expeditiously with pupil needs in mind, more pupils would be able to make a better and quicker transition. By the end of the year, the majority of the project- and comparison-group teachers agreed with Lauren, a former primary-school teacher

working in one of the project-group classes, who said, 'If we view the transition as a learning process for both of us, we can settle them in quickly. Then, we can eliminate all the extra problems at the beginning of the year.'

Table 7.14 highlights the categories of descriptions and the participants who contributed to each of them. Categories A and B re-emerged at the end of the year, while Categories C and D were new categories that emerged during the interviews at the end of the year.

| No. | Group | Name | Category A | Category B | Category C | Category D |
|----------------|-------|----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 1 | PG 1 | Caleb | X | X | X | X |
| 2 | PG2 | Nicole | X | X | | X |
| 3 | PG3 | Lauren | X | | X | X |
| 4 | PG4 | Verona | | X | X | X |
| 5 | CG1 | Martha | | | X | X |
| 6 | CG2 | Rachel | X | | X | X |
| 7 | CG3 | Lissa | | | X | X |
| 8 | CG4 | Toni | | | X | X |
| 9 | SEN1 | Carrie | | | X | |
| 10 | TA1 | Zara | | | X | X |
| 11 | TA2 | Ashleigh | | | | X |
| 12 | TA3 | Annie | | | X | X |
| 13 | TA4 | Kristen | | | | X |
| 14 | TA5 | India | | | X | X |
| 15 | TA6 | Ally | | | X | |
| 16 | LM1 | Gabby | | | X | X |
| 17 | DH | Holly | | | | X |
| 18 | H | Fern | | X | | |
| Total Response | | | 4 | 4 | 13 | 15 |

Table 7.14 classification of teaching staff contributions to categories A, B, C, and D
 (Note: The teaching staff are represented as follows: PG, project-group class teacher; CG, control-group class teacher; SEN, Special Needs Co-ordinator; TA, teaching assistant; LM, learning mentor; DH deputy head teacher; H, head teacher)

7.5.1 Implications and Findings of Teaching Staff Perceptions of Transition

This chapter addressed the subsidiary research question *What are the staff perceptions regarding the Year 7 Project transition initiative and pupil learning before and after participating in the Year 7 Project?* Table 7.15 summarises the changes in perceptions that emerged from the outcome space generated through the analysis of the interview data. The research findings in this chapter indicate that, before engaging with the Y7P, the teaching staff, as well as the deputy and head teachers, had certain perceptions about the transition to secondary schooling. At the beginning of the year, the teaching staff focused mainly on the aspect of transfer by ensuring that they were prepared to receive the pupils who were entering Year 7. By the end of the project, the focus and perception had shifted from a utilitarian perspective to a holistic view that encompassed aspects of support that were crucial for the newly transferred pupils.

As discussed throughout this chapter, both Category A (preparedness) and Category B (settling pupils quickly) are content-focused and underpinned by a utilitarian viewpoint. These categories and the themes within them identify the initial perceptions of the transition process as idealistic. The participants mentioned in this chapter, especially those from the project group of classes and, more specifically, the three former primary-school teachers – Caleb, Nicole and Lauren – tended to adjust by drawing on their experience of primary pedagogy in order to help them engage with the Y7P.

The teaching staff and the deputy and head teachers recognised and understood that moving up a grade is a natural progression, one that the staff had already experienced in most cases numerous times, with the exception of those with primary teaching experience. Through their reflection on the process and the discussions they had

during staff meetings, most participants acknowledged that their initial perceptions of the transition process and pupils making the move had changed. The move from primary to secondary schooling, however, was radically different because pupils were changing types of school as well as moving up a grade.

Two new categories emerged at the end of the year, which are referred to as Category C, transition initiative supports learning, and Category D, transition initiative supports transition success. The staff's understanding of the academic changes involved for pupils emerged after the pupils had experienced the transition to secondary schooling facilitated by the Y7P. Many phenomenographic studies have investigated the perceptions and the way these evolved from surface to deep perceptions over time (Marton et al., 1993). In this study, Categories A to D reflected a shift from surface thinking, much of which was inherited (especially in Categories A and B), to complex individual perspectives, as represented by the new Categories C and D.

| Changes in staff perspective | Individual participants |
|---|--|
| Developed from a utilitarian perception of transfer and transition that recognised that new levels of information and support are required for newly transferred pupils. Changed to a perception of self-reflection regarding their role within the Year 7 Project. | Martha, Lissa, and Toni (comparison-group teachers), Carrie (SENCO), Ally, Annie, India, Zara (project-group teaching assistants), Gabby (learning mentor), Holly (deputy head teacher) and Fern (head teacher) (N=11) |
| Developed a perception of the Year 7 Project that demonstrated some growth in perception | Caleb, Nicole, Lauren and Verona (project-group teachers) (N=4) |
| Maintained a utilitarian perception of transfer and transition | Rachel (comparison-group teacher), Ashleigh and Kristen (project-group teaching assistants) (N= 3) |

Table 7.15 Changes in teaching staff perception
(Source: Analysis of end-of-year interview data with teaching staff)

Table 7.15 provides a visual summary of how the teaching staff perceptions of the Y7P altered over the year, as revealed by the interviews at the beginning and end of the year. This table highlights how, following the analysis of end-of-year interview data, the perceptions of the teaching staff, along with those of the deputy and head teachers, had changed by the end of the academic year. This analytical exercise

allowed for an exploration of the changes in perception that occurred over the year. These perceptions were categorised into three groups, based on the perceptions of the transition and the Y7P by the end of the year. The first group consisted of the teaching staff who had originally held a utilitarian view of the transition process but exhibited a remarkable change in perception by the end of the year. The second group was composed of those who, early on, had displayed little change in perception or had expressed uncertainties in their perception of transition. However, by the end of the year, they held strong views on what was required to support pupils who were making the move to secondary schooling, especially in terms of the Y7P. The final group consisted of those whose perceptions remained utilitarian throughout the year, despite their engagement with the project.

Table 7.15 demonstrates that Martha, Lissa and Toni (comparison-group teachers); Carrie (SENCO); Ally, Annie, India, Zara and Gabby (support staff); Holly (deputy head teacher); and Fern (head teacher) all fell within the first group. These teaching staff members all possessed some knowledge regarding the transition process but, after engaging with the Y7P, acknowledged that both their perspective regarding newly transferred pupils and what was required to support them had changed. Caleb, Nicole, Lauren and Verona (project-group teachers) were new to secondary-school teaching, as they had been specifically brought in from a primary school as a part of the project. The teachers who were recruited from primary schools had limited knowledge of transfer and transition. However, Verona, the fourth project-group teacher, had already been a secondary-school teacher at the project school and, upon hearing about the Y7P, had wanted to be involved by taking one of the classes. By the end of the year, Verona acknowledged an alteration in her awareness of pupil needs, saying, 'I did not think much about the transition process before engaging with the project; but, by the end of the year, I have learnt so much.' In the final group, Rachel (comparison-group teacher), Ashleigh and Kristen (project-group teaching

assistants) did not display extensive changes in their initial thoughts regarding the transition process, even after engaging with the project. Their lack of responsiveness stands in contrast to that of Martha, a comparison-group teacher who mentioned that, before the initiative, she had not thought about the emotional and social requirements of pupils:

It is difficult to admit, but there is so much going on and targets to meet, [that] children's individual needs, like emotional needs, were not seen as important as their developmental needs or if they had special needs.

However, by the end of the Y7P, Martha was in the group that had shifted from a utilitarian perception of transfer and transition to a perception of self-reflection regarding their role within the initiative.

The analysis revealed, unsurprisingly, that individual participants reported experiencing varying extents of perceptual change after the intervention. However, the analysis also highlighted that, while the teaching staff were well aware of the transition process, there were aspects with which they were less familiar and to which they had not given much previous thought.

7.6 Summary

This chapter presented the findings regarding the perceptions of transition and learning held by the teaching staff who had participated in the Y7P. Their initial perceptions, which fell into two categories, transition and learning, were presented and analysed. The participants' perceptions of these areas developed after they engaged with the project. Interpretations of those later perceptions were also presented in two new categories of description. Concluding this chapter, a discussion of the relationships between the four categories of perceptions was presented. In this

discussion, the shift from one perspective of thinking to a more sophisticated understanding of how to support pupil transition and help provide an understanding of variation in teaching staff perceptions were presented.

The staff members, especially those with primary-school experience, reported that using a range of skills that they had acquired through working in primary education had helped their teaching strategies with the four project groups of classes. In addition, primary-school teaching had helped these teachers experience the transition process differently by working on the project. All the members of the teaching staff who were interviewed indicated that, at some point during the project, they had gained an understanding of what newly transferred pupils experienced. Changes in the teaching staff's perceptions were clarified by the end of the project. Teachers, teaching assistants and other support staff were not only more aware of the challenges faced by the newly transferred pupils, but had resolved to offer more support for the pupils in transition.

Chapter 8 Summary and Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

The overarching question that research on transition to secondary school asks is why Year 6 pupils are confident and independent and yet, at the start of Year 7, as they transition to secondary school there is a hiatus not only in their confidence but also learning. The question which has been raised by researchers over the decades underpins this study and is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the pupils' experiences and perceptions of the Year 7 Project intervention?
2. What is the staff's perception of the Year 7 Project intervention and pupils' learning before and after engaging with the project?
3. What factors in the Year 7 Project intervention affect a successful transition?

This concluding chapter summarises and integrates the major findings of the study. It discusses and recommends changes for future developments in the transfer and transition debate, based on research conducted at Erin Sinclair Secondary School (ESSS). This study also considers the conclusions of and recommendations from the existing literature on transition research. Particular attention is paid to the need for pupils to adjust to their new school environment, which includes social, institutional and curriculum adjustment (Hargreaves & Galton, 2002; Evangelou et al., 2008). The findings from the Y7P and the transition theory has provided an understanding of transition by considering the impact of the teaching provision and availability of resources, the design of the project and how pupils with low literacy levels settle during the first year of secondary schooling.

The study highlighted three areas in the form of research questions which explored the transition to secondary school via engagement with the Year 7 Project (Y7P). It raised additional questions about the pupils' ability to adapt, participate and navigate their new environment. The study focused on two distinct group of pupils (Project and Comparison) and the Year 7 teaching staff. While this thesis looked at the project classes, namely those with additional support following a primary school pedagogy, the comparison group followed the normal secondary curriculum and pedagogic practices. Engaging within the project group of classes meant differences in classroom routine, pedagogies and use of additional support for those who worked more productively in smaller groups.

A wealth of existing literature that analysed the transition at a macro level (Muschamp, 2011) by defining effective policy and procedural devices to ensure a seamless transition to secondary school. Despite this research and others highlight in Chapter 2, a number of pupils still struggle at the point of transition to secondary school, with 15% transferring students failing to thrive in their secondary schools (Evans et al., 2010). National and international research has indicated that the transition to secondary school is a critical time for some pupils. Therefore, this study explored the pupils' and teaching staff's perceptions of the transition process to provide insights into what takes places during this critical period. Within the framework of this study, a successful transition to secondary school reflects the Year 7 Project school's approach to supporting all incoming pupils including those who are at risk of not settling into their new environment.

8.2 Summary of Main Findings

Moving from one school to another or, in this case, from primary to secondary school, has garnered the interest of education management and researchers. The Senior Management Team (SMT) in ESSS recognised that their incoming pupils were

academically and socially unprepared for secondary school which formed the premise of this research, which is a comprehensive analysis of the lived reality of the primary-to-secondary-school transition process as experienced by the pupils and teaching staff engaged in an initiative called the Year 7 Project. This phenomenographic study concentrated on the transition to a secondary school in South East England known by the pseudonym of ESSS. The study further aimed to develop an understanding of the way in which transitions occur and the process that both pupils and teaching staff engage in.

This thesis examined the perceptions expressed by pupils and teaching staff in one comprehensive school in an urban area in South East England about the transfer and transition process from primary to secondary school. Thousands of pupils around the world experience this move as part of their academic journey every year. The move presents new experiences for all pupils. While unfamiliar situations are likely to occur for several weeks or longer, school transfer is a process that continues over several months. It is not a single event. It is, therefore, unreasonable to expect pupils to adjust instantly to the changes they may experience.

The perspectives of the participants in this lived-experience were analysed through a phenomenographic lens. They provided current and prompt reflections about their experiences. This researcher was motivated to engage with this topic because of their own experiences as a pupil transitioning in the Commonwealth of the Bahamas which negatively affected their academic and social performance in the first year of secondary schooling.

As indicated throughout this thesis, transitioning to secondary school remains a contentious issue as has been evidence in this study as well. Previous works have indicated the importance of understanding the concept of transition. For instance,

Hayes and Vivian (2008) noted that discontinuity is prevalent in the school curriculum. Anderson et al. (2000) noted that discontinuity in organisational and social domains is one of the main factors that affect school transition. Arthur et al. (2010) indicated that continuity in education is vital for adolescent development in relation to character building and life skills development. Hayes and Vivian (2001) noted that continuity is important for a true adjustment to any new environment, not solely for conformity to secondary school. It is therefore, clear that this research is ideal and timely in adding to the knowledge about this topic. This research has highlighted that the transition from primary school to secondary school is unique due to the significant differences in the two groups of pupils. Differences between them, in areas such as their academic abilities which directly affect the transition to secondary school. The main reason found was that generally the pupils in the project were more curious and motivated to learn in their new environment. However, there were the a few who thought they were being treated as 'babies'.

The period of adjustment for pupils between primary and secondary school has been noted to critically impact the lives of adolescents positively or negatively. Among the effects observed in this study were the impact on pupils' well-being, on-going learning and development as they engaged with the transition process. In highlighting the justification for this study, the researcher noted that a successful transition has been associated with hope for the future, new opportunities and challenges, greater responsibilities and the opportunity to change old habits and make a new start. School transition is, therefore, an opportunity to increase pupils' learning, well-being and ability to settle into the new environment of secondary school. The research indicated that preparation and support are important factors influencing successful school transition. This finding underlines the importance of continuing research about the transition process since it would help teachers and other school staff to develop their

own skills and understanding of the appropriate approaches to transition activities which will in turn foster transitional success.

This thesis has added to the knowledge of the transition to secondary schooling debate. Importantly, by using a phenomenographic research approach, it described, as faithfully as possible, the variations in the way its participants perceived the transition process. It also revealed various ways in which the school's pupils and teaching staff experienced the Y7P. The major research outcome of the thesis is a comprehensive insight into the ways in which its participants perceived their own thoughts while initially participating in the project and at its conclusion.

8.3 Contributing to the transition debate

The findings of the study have significant implications for parents, teachers and stakeholders in the education sector and contributed to the transition to secondary school debate. The transition of pupils from primary to secondary school is an important issue which crosses national borders. Various international studies have suggested that there is a noticeable decline in pupils' academic achievement after moving to secondary school (Counts, 2010).

This research will, therefore, be relevant for those addressing the concerns of and impacts on pupils transitioning to secondary school. It will be relevant in tackling the discontinuity in organisational and social domains, which are among the main factors affecting school transition among adolescents. Education stakeholders will be better informed about how to deal with the issue of discontinuity that is commonly experienced in the process of school transition. This study asserts that continuity in education is vital for adolescent development, enhancing character development amongst pupils and facilitating the development of life skills. The study emphasises

the importance of understanding how to deal with and facilitate the transition to a new school by helping pupils adjust to a new environment. Stakeholders will also be able to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the variations that make this transition different among pupils. This study offers guidance to assist them in the process of designing transition initiatives and relevant policies.

The study is also informative about the role of the pupil in the transition process and provided an insight into the process through lived experiences. This leads to the realisation that pupils are at the core of the transition process and need to be prioritised in any initiative being developed aimed at assisting them to better manage their transition. With this in mind, the implication and its contribution to the further research on transition to secondary school, this study helps parents and teachers understand their own perspectives on the transition and move to secondary school.

One such perspective is that most pupils perceive the transition to secondary school as a step towards adulthood and as an opportunity to make new friends or as a new start. This perspective indicates that prior to moving to secondary school, pupils have a positive perspective towards it, which can be built upon to make the transition lead to better outcomes. This study helps parents understand that while it is their task to participate in their child's life by choosing their school, the pupils are also happy and eager to share their perceptions of the school choice.

Teachers and parents need to support pupils' transition by assisting them in the preparation and this does by no means imply that they are the only players. The school administrators, including the head teacher and deputy head teacher, all adopt an integral role in the coordination of the transition process. It is important to understand that the pupils' perceptions, identified in the study, may not exhaustively cover the activities and relevant players in the transition. This points towards the need

to consider the contribution of other players in the education sector who can aid transition and enhance stakeholder involvement in it.

While teaching staff plays an integral part in the transition process, this study draws attention to the contributions of the teaching staff in ensuring the effectiveness of their perceptions about the transition. It has been identified in this study that the teaching staff also needs to be better prepared to encourage, manage, and prepare pupils joining secondary school from primary. This lack of preparation highlighted is necessary as it informs the school management team of the need to instigate teacher preparedness before the pupils enter Year 7. The study identifies that teachers perceive their role in helping pupils prepare for secondary education as important. The study pointed out that staff need to make initial decisions and pre-empt pupil requirements so that the necessary provisions will be available to support successful transition. The teaching staff indicated the need to support pupils in this process.

In organizing and designing a transition programme, the environment plays an important part in transition success. The study emphasises the need to create a familiar school environment to facilitate the settling process. This emphasis aligns with earlier research by Ferguson and Fraser (1998), whose work indicated that environmental familiarity played a critical role in ensuring transition success. Thus, the nature of the classroom environment needs to be emphasised. Through this study, the teachers indicated that once pupils are comfortable in their surroundings, they tend to be more relaxed, which leads to learning improvement. A familiar environment is thus a component of the settling process. Employing teaching assistants to offer additional support to pupils struggling with certain subjects and behavioural problems was one of the teachers' proposals to support learners. The school's Senior Management Team (SMT) aimed to support Y7 pupils who were unable to access the curriculum and offer additional support in the hope of easing their transition to

secondary school which the Y7P has addressed successfully according to the teaching staff.

Besides discussing the current transition issues at ESSS, this study has added to the general body of knowledge and understanding about the transition to secondary school. It has been suggested that small groups of Year 7 pupils be created for teaching and that the biological age and emotional development should be considered while providing support. This study has also highlighted the need for pupil and teacher preparedness regarding the transfer, as well as support for pupils as they move in, through and out of the transition process. Overall, transition should be given more attention in schools and in education research. The unique contribution of this study lies in its provision and analysis of local data about an area which has dearth of empirical research and specific knowledge. It is of critical importance that researchers and teachers know what goes on during the transition to secondary school in order to best support pupils.

This thesis has highlighted the issues and importance of the transition to secondary school in the UK. It has discussed and substantiated the finding that the transition process is worthy of further research from national and international perspectives. This point is important considering that a sparse amount of research has been carried out in this field in the UK with most of it having taken place in London or large urban cities, to the neglect of other parts of the country.

8.4 Recommendations for Future Research

A key focus of this study was to gather the perceptions about a transition project from pupils and teaching staff. One of the motivations for developing the project was to support pupils with low literacy in their move to secondary school. As a

phenomenographic investigation the research presented here has revealed the different ways in which pupils and teaching staff perceived the phenomenon of the transition to secondary school. This study has contributed to further understanding of the transition process and its impact on learning during a critical stage in the educational development of pupils. However, the transition from primary to secondary school is a complex phenomenon that needs more analysis than this study produced. In addition, although the outcomes of this research offer some understanding of pupils and teaching staff perceptions, they also reveal the incompleteness of this picture and suggest the need for further research. Considering this, the following recommendations are offered.

Firstly, in order to test the validity and value of a similar transition to secondary school intervention, a similar but expanded project can be designed. The new project design would have three groups of pupils. The first group of pupils with low literacy levels would receive the changed curriculum and pedagogic interventions as outlined in Chapter 1 while another group of low achieving pupil would follow the standard Year 7 curriculum. This arrangement would permit better assessment of the extent to which pupils with low literacy scores can access the standard Year 7 curriculum. The third group, the comparison group of students of higher-ability pupils who would also follow the standard Year 7 curriculum. This proposed investigation differs from the current study which had two groups of pupils where only those with lower literacy scores were given additional help and support from teachers. This meant that a comparison of another low achieving group was not possible. However, if there were another group of low achieving pupil who were not exposed to the changes then a more accurate and in-depth evaluation can ensue.

Secondly, this research explored the transition experience of pupils in a small, traditional secondary school, but their experiences were from a generic perspective.

Replicating this study outside London or urban cities and focus on other parts of the country would provide an insight on the argument of whether the environment affects transitional success. Exploring these new areas would raise new aspects of the debate on pupils making the move from primary to secondary school. In addition, most of the published research on transfer and transition identified only a few countries which have made a significant contribution to the debate namely, the United Kingdom, United States of America, and Australia and again in larger cities. There was a lack of research from the Caribbean, Africa, South America, Canada and Asia. This scarcity of research poses the question of whether educationalists in these countries recognize or are aware of the social and academic issues pupils face as they move from one school or phase to the next. It is clear in this thesis that during certain periods in the life of a pupil there are challenges to be met including developmental milestones, changes in environment and the expectations associated with the transition to secondary school.

Thirdly, this research explored the transition from secondary school through personal experiences of the participants with part of the evidence based on recall on the part of the pupils as they move through the transition process. As in other qualitative research approaches which can generally provide greater depth of knowledge of a specific subject, a more focused study could provide greater depth of understanding of each element of Schlossberg's transition theory in respect of the transition to secondary school, namely, moving in, moving through and moving out of the transition process. Evans et al. (2010) noted that it is "impossible to affirm that the transition process occurs in the manner in which Schlossberg and her colleagues have outlined it" and it was an appropriate tool for understanding pupils' and teaching staff's transition experience in this study. Further research, which needs to be conducted, may refine existing exploratory frameworks or develop new lines inquiry into transition.

The final recommendation for future research is that parental perspectives of transition should be explored. While parents play an important role there was insufficient room for them to express their views in this study. During the interviewing process with pupils and teaching staff, and more so during the analysis stage, the importance of the role of parents became clear. From pupil interviews, some mentioned that parents choose their secondary school. This encouraged a further discussion with the other pupils to explore their views on parental involvement in secondary school choice. This information was reported in Chapter 8. Academic research shows a strong relationship between pupil achievement levels and parental support and involvement. Such support takes many forms including providing children with a stable and secure environment, supporting their aspirations and getting involved in school related activities (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003). In most research on the transition to secondary school, there is little known about parental perceptions of the transition process. However, O'Brien (2001) and Topping (2011) indicated that parents are concerned about how their children will adjust to the new level of school work, making new friends and bullying in the new school.

8.5 Limitations of the study

It is important to explore some of the limitations of the current research. It could be argued that this study was limited in that the research was a case study without the element of comparison of another school that was relatively different. This pointed to the generalisability of participants' perceptions of the transition process and their learning was also limited, with transferability requiring a degree of caution. As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, there are several debates regarding transferring from primary to secondary school and gaps between what is being done and what might be done to ease transition. Moreover, there are significant differences in the strategies and approaches each primary and secondary school uses to address

this process. Further research with a greater number of participants and a wider range of samples in various parts of the UK would be required to present a more comprehensive picture of the perceptions of newly transferred pupils and teaching staff involved in making the transition from primary to secondary school.

Another limitation of this study is that it was exclusively based on the recollections and self-reports of participants namely the pupils. The reliability of such reports is always questionable as, for instance, there might be differences between professed and actual beliefs. Because the nature of this study is based on participant perceptions, there may have been a discrepancy between what participants said, what participants thought they did and what happened in a situation. Participants may have been tempted to agree with beliefs that they had thought were expected of them, thus, masking their real opinions and experiences. A study which involved in a pre and post transition enquiry (from primary to secondary school) may have provided more evidence that would contribute to the different experiences as participants shared their lived experiences of the participating in the Year 7 Project. They may have produced more interesting data in exploring the transition process from its beginning to end without having to depend on recollection of information. It may have also been interesting to interview parents or carers of pupils to gain a more holistic perspective and understanding of transition experience.

Another limitation of this research that must be acknowledged is the 'change in direction and design of the Year 7 Project. Although it was clear from the onset that the project classes were reserved for those identified with low literacy levels and those who had the potential of not settling into secondary school. However, by the third week, pupils from the comparison group with behavioural problems were moved to one of the project group. This affected the research design and skewed the reading and spelling data which was abandoned because it did not show an accurate

reflection of the pupils' ability at the beginning and end of the academic year. The only consistent data was the pupils' perception of the project and for both groups how they are navigating the first year of secondary school. This limit my research interest and I was unable to explore the impact of the project on learning and whether it had improved literacy learning.

Despite these limitations, there is merit in analysing the perceptions and experiences of participants and investigating the process of change in their beliefs, since it is likely that, while people go through their lives, they adjust their thinking and behaviour constantly in order to adapt to circumstances. Overall, the findings of this study provide an exploratory indication of the perceptions of pupils and teaching staff in one secondary school in an urban area of Southeast England. The findings also constitute a basis for further research.

8.6 Reflection on research journey

It was my own 'transition' from teacher to researcher that formed the most significant part of my own learning journey. This research has taken me on a development journey from a full-time teaching position and business owner in the Bahamas to a full-time PhD student and researcher. My journey which is similar to that of the pupils in this research allowed me to look back and reflect on the Year 7 Project through the eyes of a teacher. The Year 7 Project was important to my learning and development as it allowed me to grow as a researcher as I scrutinize the project's design from an outsider's perspective as to, whether the project was fit for purpose through the voice of the participants engaging with the project. I have learnt how to be critical and reflective by being more inquisitive and robust while engaging with literature and data. This trend of thought has made me realized that my role was quickly changing from that of a teacher of children to one who research children (pupils) and teaching staff.

The experience gained as a teacher and working in a school gave me the confidence to build a rapport with pupils and teaching staff which generated some interesting conversations and a place within the school community.

As one can gather, the transition to a PhD student was very difficult and the process was not straightforward. Even so, each step throughout the process I have adapted to the new chapter or phase in my life with positivity despite the situation. Although I accomplished each phase of the study with some degree of success, on reflection I compare my experience with those of the pupils in this research and recognize that I to have experienced 'moving in', 'moving through' and 'moving out' of the transition process. However, as I progress towards the end of this journey, I am entering the 'moving out' phase of the transition process with more confidence as a researcher.

On reflection, one of the strengths of the Year 7 Project is that I was given full access to all the Year 7 classes and teaching staff. My presence was welcomed and being in the class became a normal part of the daily routine. This provide a platform and space for pupils and teaching staff to get to know me and over time, this space became a place for reflection and discussion outside the main classroom.

Although the early experience from pupils and teaching staff participating in the study were positive, there were flaws in the Year 7 Project which could benefit from some minor changes to the design. Firstly, the initial study design aim was to focus on pupils with low literacy levels and needed additional support. However, by the end of first week, other pupils with behavioural behaviour regardless of their ability from the comparison group were moved to the project group. This cause an upset in the data and I had to abandon the spelling and reading data because of the ceiling affect during the analysis process. In addition, those with behavioural disrupted the class and they were taken out of to join smaller groups with meant that some children who needed

the additional support were denied. This was major flaw in the design. Secondly, the design should include an intermediate transition programme which means more classes taught by a different teacher would be introduced in the final term of Year 7. As highlighted in Chapter 6 most if not all the early anxieties should have dissipated, and they are more settled. The intermediate transition process would prepare them for the move to Year 8 to ensure a smooth and successful transition.

Choosing the topic of transition to secondary school was purely to contribute to this field of study not only here in the United Kingdom but to use the knowledge and experience gained in The Bahamas to set up a transition project to support pupils like myself who did not transition to secondary school successfully.

Overall, my experience on this journey was filled with opportunities to learn and grow as a researcher which I have embraced. The highs and lows of the process has shaped me as a researcher and given me the confidence to replicate a similar project in The Bahamas.

8.7 Concluding Comments

In conclusion, the research has achieved its aims although it took much longer than expected. Although the journey was long and sometimes difficult, it will be a worthwhile journey if the findings challenge others to raise a series of questions about how to support pupils during the transition from primary to secondary school.

The notion of schooling has change during the writing of this thesis and some primary and secondary schools look different from then to now. It would be remiss of me to mention how this change may influence future research on transition from primary to secondary school. The most notable difference and one that is line with this research

is the introduction of Academies in 2002-2010 under the Labour government to raise the educational standard in disadvantage areas and those of low performance. The idea was to remove the failing schools from the Local authority control and bringing in sponsors as governance, introducing autonomy and greater freedom for teachers and governance. According to Andrews and Perera (2017) under the Labour government, academies had, on average, a positive effect on pupils' end of secondary school attainment. The Coalition government in 2010 passed the Academies Act which gave powers to higher performing schools to convert to academy status. This gave them autonomy and freedom to form their own governance outside of the local authority.

It is only recent that there are more primary school that have been converted to academies and their educational outcomes have yet to be measured as was outlined by Andrews and Perera (2017). Most of the research on academies have focused on secondary school and educational outcomes and there has been no literature on transition primary to secondary school in the academies programme after conducting a comprehensive literature search.

This leaves the question that even with the introduction and insurgencies of academies and 'All through schools' is there still the element of the transition to secondary school that still exist. At the academies, there is still the break at age 11 where pupils move from primary to secondary school and they are working at an expected level and whether or not they are working at this level.

Therefore, the issues are still existing and therefore the issues that raised in this study remain. Given that there is a dearth of literature on the transition of pupils progressing in the all through schools or academies, this would be a useful a venue for further

research as some may not have to make a physical or a specific move but nonetheless there is the primary to secondary or key 2 to 3 shift is still there.

To conclude this study and as discussed in the literature review Chapter 2, there have been various attempts to improve the transition to secondary school by implementing interventions using a variety of research methods and instruments. The literature reviewed highlighted that during the transfer, schools need to redirect their efforts towards achieving a balance between social and academic concerns because these could directly impact the success of transitioning to a new school. This suggests that schools should provide some form of extended induction to help pupils transition and prepare for academic success. Indeed, this study found that the prospect of leaving primary school to attend secondary school is one that most pupils approach with a mixture of anticipation and apprehension. Some participants reported seeing secondary school as an unknown place where they might be bullied or a set of buildings that they may have seen before but did not know. Other participants saw the transfer to secondary school as a positive challenge and opportunity for a new start, for meeting new friends and for learning new and exciting subjects. The participants entered secondary school with expectations based on their own aspirations and goals along with those of their parents and the stories they may have heard from friends, siblings and primary-school teachers.

Finally, what next? Where do we go from here? The findings of this thesis urge its readers teachers, Parents, educational stakeholders, and Researchers to reflect on the latter question to help ensure more favourable outcomes for pupils as they move into, through and out of the transition in the first year of secondary schooling regardless the structure whether local authority or an Academy. Transition remains a complex area of research. However, it is important to note that transition research still

has a long way to go to enable sustainable, confident and seamless learning as pupils transition into secondary school.

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Appendix 1 – Perception questionnaire

NAME: _____

CLASS: _____



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WE WANT TO KNOW ...

This questionnaire is to find out what you think about your present school and how you felt before coming here. Put a ring or circle around YES if you agree or NO if you don't agree. (Adapted from a previous study)

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. You were worried about going to a new school | YES | NO |
| 2. This school is better than primary | YES | NO |
| 4. I worry about new subjects | YES | NO |
| 5. I am afraid to ask teachers for help if I don't understand | YES | NO |
| 6. The work here is difficult | YES | NO |
| 7. The school is too big | YES | NO |
| 8. Having a different teacher for each subject is good | YES | NO |
| 9. I worry about exams | YES | NO |
| 10. I am joining or have joined clubs. | YES | NO |

Please answer ALWAYS, SOMETIMES or NEVER by placing a tick in the correct box.

| | ALWAYS | SOMETIMES | NEVER |
|---|--------|-----------|-------|
| 1 I wish I was still at Primary School | | | |
| 2. I enjoy doing my homework | | | |
| 3. I get worried about my school work | | | |
| 4. I worry about losing things | | | |
| 5. I get scared among so many children | | | |
| 6. Lessons at my new school are interesting | | | |
| 7. I like wearing uniform | | | |
| 8. I like this school | | | |
| 9. I hate this school | | | |
| 10. I wish I had gone to another school | | | |

Please read the questions and answer as honestly as possible. Put a tick in the column you agree with either YES, NO or SOMETIMES.

| | YES | NO | SOMETIMES |
|--|-----|----|-----------|
| 1. I forget how to do things after we've been told | | | |
| 2. I don't understand what I am supposed to do | | | |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| 3. People are disappointed with me | | | |
| 4. It is hard to be me | | | |
| 5. I have hardly any friends in my class | | | |
| 6. Other children don't seem to like me | | | |
| 7. Some children pick on me | | | |
| 8. I forget how to do my homework | | | |
| 9. I wish teachers would explain things better | | | |
| 10. 10.I can work thing out by myself | | | |
| 11. 11.I am good at most things | | | |
| 12. 12.School work is easy | | | |
| 13. 13. My teacher thinks I am good at my work | | | |
| 14. 14.I find it easy to get along with other children | | | |
| 15. 15.I am popular | | | |
| 16. 16.I have lots of friends in school | | | |
| 17. 17.Other children choose me as the leader | | | |
| 18. 18.Other children like to work with me | | | |
| 19. 19.My attendance affects my learning in school | | | |
| 20. 20. When I have been away, I find it hard to catch up with the work that everyone else is doing. | | | |

Appendix 2 – Interview schedule for focus/group interview with pupils

Introduction

My name is Paulet Brown and like you I am a student, not a high school but university. I want to talk to you about school, things you like or dislike about school and what you do on a day-to-day basis.

I want to assure you that what we discuss will not leave this room and if it does your names would not be mentioned. I want this to be private and if necessary I would use pseudo/false names to protect your privacy. Would you mind if I record our conversation? Thanks

When did school start?

Was that for all of the students?

Were you ready to come back to school?

Was there excitement?

What were some of your expectations?

During the time you were here, did the school meet your expectations?

If yes explain, if no, explain.

Generally how do you feel about school?

What about this school?

Was it your first choice?

How are your classes?

What is your daily activity or tell me how are your classes organised day-to-day?

Do you like it? Why or why not?

Appendix 3 – Interview schedule for teaching staff

What is your official title?

How many years have you been in that position?

Can you tell me what you know about the Year 7 Project?

What are some of the other support roles?

What are some of the challenges of your job?

What is your role in fostering good behaviour?

Have you seen any differences with the group of Y7 students as a result of the Year 7 Project?

What are the differences between pupils in the project and non-project classes?

What are some of the pupils' challenges?

What type of support do these pupils receive?

Appendix 4 – Research contract

Paulet Brown, Institute of Education, University of London
and

Erin Sinclair Secondary School

The aim of this study is to investigate and analyse the progress of year 7 students. The students were placed in two groups; one a control group and the other is an experimental group. It is the intention of the researcher to measure students' motivational level, academic progress and attainment over a one-year period. The areas mentioned will be measured with the use of questionnaires, random observations and interviews.

RESEARCH QUESTION

An investigation into the effect of a new initiative plan to ease the anxiety of Year 7 students.

Areas of focus:-

- transfer and transition
- motivation level (social and academic)
- academic progress

The role of the researcher is to act as an eye without changing or disturbing the empirical setting. Interaction will be as minimal as possible with the participants in the research.

Reasons for the non-participation is to:-

- Gain a more comprehensive view of what is being observed.
- Become more detached from personal specific agenda and opinions.
- Gain more of an objective view of the reality being investigated.
- Act as a conduit.

DATA SOURCE

The students:-

- student perception questionnaires
- observations (random)
- interviews (randomly)
- reading scores (NFER-Nelson)
- spelling tests (P.E. Vernon Graded Word Spelling Test)
- writing samples (randomly)

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE RESEARCHER

- To ensure proper permission has been established.
- Inform the administration of the method of testing.
- To ensure anonymity and confidentiality.
- To use pseudonym names if they are needed.

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SCHOOL

- To allow access to the information that is needed to complete the study
- Full participation from the staff who are participants.
- To understand that the information collected is confidential until published.

Signatures _____ Date _____

Appendix 5 – Parent permission letter

September 25, 2002

Dear Parent:

I am a PhD student from the Institute of Education, University of London and would like to include your child, along with his or her classmates to participate in a research project on 'Making the transition from Primary to Secondary School. However, I would like them to complete a questionnaire, writing and spelling test and if selected by the teacher a short focus group interview.

Your child's participation in this project is completely voluntary. In addition to your permission, your child will also be asked if he or she would like to take part in this project. Only those children who have parental permission and who want to participate will do so, and any child may stop taking part at any time. You are free to withdraw your permission for your child's participation at any time and for any reason without penalty. These decisions will have no effect on your future relationship with the school or your child's status or grades there.

The information that is obtained during this research project will be kept strictly confidential and will not become a part of your child's school record. Any sharing or publication of the research results will not identify any of the participants by name or the name of the school.

In the space at the bottom of this letter, please indicate whether you **do or do not** want your child to participate in this project and return this note to your child's teacher before 01/10/2002. I look forward to working with your child. We think that our research will be enjoyable for the children who participate and will help them to learn about their move to secondary and how they are coping with the changes.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact us using the information below. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the Institute of Education on 02076123000

Please keep the attached copy of this letter for your records.

Sincerely,

Paulet Brown
07855746186
p.brown@ioe.ac.uk

I **do/do not (circle one)** give permission for my child _____
(name of child) to participate in the research project described above.

(Print) Parent's name _____

Parent's signature _____ Date _____

Brown, Paulet
MPhil/PhD Student
Institute of Education, University of London

Improving literacy skills of 'at risk' students one year after transfer to secondary school

Transferring from primary to secondary school is argued to be among the first significant (psycho-social) life events children face and for some, this move results in poor adjustment. At a multi-cultural London secondary school, the majority of incoming Year 7 students were identified as 'at risk' of poor adjustment academically and socially. Immediate measures were taken to address this problem. As a result, the school designed 'The Year 7 Project' to assist students in improving their literacy and numeracy skills. This paper highlights part of the evaluation of the project that adapted the curriculum and its mode of delivery to improve literacy learning in students identified as 'at risk' of academic failure. Preliminary analysis finds that curriculum and pedagogic changes to improve literacy to secondary school had a worthwhile effort. Lessons learned and further research suggestions are discussed.

An increasing amount of research is being undertaken in an attempt to address the many questions about why so many students experience academic decline after moving from primary to secondary school. From the late 1960's, researchers have initiated various projects and programmes with the aim of helping students make an easy transition as well as to better understand the problems associated with transfer and transition.

Experiencing the start of a new school, changing classes and adjusting to a larger environment may produce mixed feelings in children. Lucey & Reay, (2000) and Zeedyk et al. (2003) have indicated that most students making the transition have considerable anxieties about the change, but, until recently, positive anticipation about the new anxieties were not given much attention.

This paper provides preliminary analysis from the evaluation of the literacy aspects of the Year 7 Project which contributed to an improvement in literacy scores of year 7 students.

Transfer and Transition

Many researchers have defined transfer as the process of moving from one school to the next (Galton 1983; King-Rice 1997; Galton 1999; Galton and Pell 2000). In this paper, transfer will specifically concern the move from primary to secondary school. Transition however, is not so easily defined. A variety of interpretations exist as to the meaning of transition in the educational process. Some of the literature defines transition as a one-time set of activities undertaken by programmes, or initiative for families, and children at the end of the year (Phillips 1969; Nash 1973; Dutch & McCall 1977). Others define transition as the manifestation of developmental principles of curricular continuity in creating pedagogical, and or disciplinary approaches that transcend and continue between primary and secondary school (OFSTED 1999; Galton and Pell 2000). The latter definition will be used in this paper when referring to transition.

Transfer and transition are increasingly being recognised as critical periods in the movement through education. Researchers focusing on this area are paying closer attention to students rather than the process per se. Youngman & Lunzer (1977) were the first to explore adjustment to secondary school in the UK. They were particularly interested in the potential problems that occur after transfer. More recently, Galton and Pell (2000) highlight this as one of the areas that has a limited literature.

Early researchers recognised that moving from one stage to another is rooted in the political context in which they take place. In the UK, one of the results of these political debates was the Hadow Report (1926) which proposed separate schools for infants and juniors, and an exam (later to become known as the 11+). Later, Nisbet and Entwistle (1969) opposed these views by suggesting that a 'clean cut' between primary and secondary schooling was likely to have an adverse effect on student attainment, arguing instead that emotional adjustment of some children, especially those who were younger, less stable or from a lower working class background would be most affected. This view was reinforced in the Plowden Report (1967), which discussed the potentially harmful effects of "sudden", rather than a "prepared" change. Nisbet and Entwistle (1969) also argued that rather than focusing on a single age for transfer, a transitional period from ages 10 to 13 coincide with a gradual change in curriculum and style of teaching should be considered. They proposed that adjusting from a child-centred curriculum and teaching style, to a subject-based curriculum while having an individual teacher for each subject would be more effective. This would allow students to be introduced to a subject-based curriculum and different subject teacher and weaned away from the class-based teacher experience in the primary school.

By the mid-1970s policies specific to transfer and transition began to emerge in the UK. Both the Hargreaves (1984) and Thomas Report (1985) devoted a lot of attention to primary and secondary education. These reports proposed that information was lacking on the effectiveness of policies. In previous years, students attending the local primary school would attend the local secondary school. However, in the late 1960s, students transferring to Year 7 began moving to secondary schools outside

their local areas. They also noted that, this move away from 'localised' education services presented many more challenges. Transition became more difficult. Liaisons between schools became more difficult and, students' records and other transfer information were sometimes delayed or misplaced.

It was also at this point that discussions of students' motivation and achievement during transfer to secondary school emerged. Researchers concluded that a decrease in achievement and motivation, at times, resulted in behaviour problems at, and after, transfer to secondary school (Youngman and Lunzer 1977; Galton 1980; Alspaugh 1998; Galton and Pell 2000; Lucey and Raey 2000; Zeedyk 2000).

Poor adjustment to secondary school can manifest itself either academically or socially and, in some instances, in both (Mortimore et al.1998). Earlier studies conclude that most children identified as "at risk" during the transfer process were younger, less mature, less confident, had a non-academic disposition and often from poor social and economic backgrounds (Nisbet & Entwistle 1969; Measor & Wood, 1984). Such students are also thought to have problems adjusting to the physical as well as the academic aspects of secondary school (Ferguson 1998). Other factors which may compound the difficulties of transition are that students may be eligible for Free School Meals (FSM)², have special educational needs, may belong to certain ethnic groups (black and ethnic minorities) and those are less fluent in English. However, it must be noted that not all children who are affected by these factors are open to underachievement. For example, Mortimore (1988) and Blair and Bourne (1998) have shown that some children exposed to these factors do achieve and adjust academically.

Mortimore (1988) and Catterall (1998) in exploring transfer and transition considered how teachers predict students' responses to transfer and whether or not they have the potential to adjust successfully to secondary school. In making judgments, teachers at times may operate at a level of generality which may result in particular individuals or groups being ignored or targeted. Several writers agree with this by proposing that some teachers are not generally correct in their assessments or predictions (Rudduck 1996). Furthermore, they argue that many difficulties arise not because students lack potential, but because they develop unsatisfactory friendships or that they may not receive the necessary help after transfer to secondary school.

Background

As a means of attending to the progressive decline in literacy skills scores for incoming Year 7 students, a secondary school in London decided to implement a project to improve literacy learning and ease transition anxieties. The school has a large number of students (approximately 70%) that speak English as an Additional Language (EAL). Due to limited language proficiency in English many of these students have achieved low Standard Assessment Task scores (SATs)³ at the end of Year 6 (10-11 yrs) and as a consequence were considered at risk of academic failure, that is, of not being able to fully access the Key Stage 3 curriculum. Students were considered at risk particularly in reading and therefore needed provision with regular opportunities to develop and apply further reading skills. All of the aforementioned were considered in the planning, design and implementation the Year 7 Project.

The purpose of the current research was to evaluate the effectiveness of the literacy component of the intervention. The aspect of the evaluation to be discussed here addresses the following question: would implementing a highly structured literacy project with a changed curriculum and primary school pedagogic style effectively increase the literacy scores of 'at risk' students in Year 7?

Design of the Year 7 Project

The school, in designing the Year 7 Project aimed to address underachievement in both literacy and numeracy. By introducing the Year 7 project, the school hoped that students would regain confidence in their work, raise their literacy and numeracy levels and benefit from improved access to the Year 7 curriculum. Only the literacy progress of Year 7 students will be discussed in this paper.

As a part of the design for the Year 7 Project, incoming students were placed in one of two groups, the experimental and the control. Each group was made up of four classes, i.e. a total of eight classes. Students in the experimental group were identified as showing weaknesses in literacy and therefore did not have the ability to access the Year 7 curriculum. This observation resulted in the rearrangement of the curriculum which would assist students in preparation for the curriculum. The control group were more academically able and could access the curriculum, therefore their learning continued with the Year 7 curriculum. The grouping of the students was based on information received from the Key Stage 2 SATs standardized reading and spelling tests assessed at the end of the primary years.

To assist students in the experimental group, the curriculum was adapted and its mode of delivery changed to improve students' literacy learning. This was accomplished by making two main changes to the curriculum. Firstly, given that a significant number of English as Additional Language (EAL) students were already struggling with English it was decided that instead of taking required Modern Foreign Language (MFL) French, this time could be better utilised by additional English literacy work.

The second change addressed the creation of a familiar atmosphere to ease anxiety associated with transfer and transition to secondary school. The school created an environment that was similar to that of primary school. Within this environment students would have one teacher in the same classroom

² Free School Meal (FSM) an indicator of parents' economic status

³ Standardised reading and spelling tests, assessed at the end of the primary school years.

for four of their lessons rather than a variety of teachers in different rooms with different subject disciplines. This change also led to the employment of three primary teachers whilst a fourth was recruited from within the school. This did not add to the school's operating budget because the school was about to recruit three new teachers anyway. The remit for these teachers of the experimental group included teaching four subjects: mathematics, English, PSHE⁴ and humanities while assisting specialist teachers during IT and Food Design and Technology classes.

While these two changes directly affected the curriculum and its delivery, there were other changes which affected students in the experimental groups exclusively. Firstly, students in the experimental group with the poorest literacy scores on the NFER group reading test were encouraged to attend optional reading tutor groups by participating in a computer assisted Scientific Reading Association (SRA) reading enrichment programme. Secondly, the amount of support in each experimental class was increased. Along with the main teacher, in most instances there was a learning mentor⁵, a teaching assistant, and/or member of the Special Educational Needs team. Finally, the introduction of small groups for maths and English was included to provide further support. The small groups provided extra support for students within the project who found it difficult to concentrate and work effectively in larger classroom settings.

Methodology

This was a mixed methods evaluation of a project that was designed by the school senior management team utilising a quasi-experimental approach during the normal academic year.

Participants

For this study, the first group of participants included all students entering Year 7 who transferred from five primary feeder schools within the local education authority. During the period of data collection, the school population decreased from 224 to 186. This decline was due to high turnover and to exclusion⁶. There were 74 students in the experimental classes and 95 in the control classes at the pre-test stage and 82 in the experimental and 99 in the control classes during the post test.

The school provided information about the students including: SATs results, Special Educational Needs (SEN) status, languages spoken and levels of fluency and whether or not students had behavioural problems. Within the total YEAR 7 population there were eighteen languages other than English spoken. Seventy-seven percent students of the experimental group are English as Additional Language speakers while 23% spoke English as their first language. However, within the control group 33% of students in the control group spoke English as a first language while 67% spoke a language other than English as Additional Language.

The second group of participants were the implementers of the project which included three ex-primary teachers, one secondary history teacher, special educational needs workers, learning mentors, classroom assistants, Head and Deputy Head teacher. With the exception of the three ex-primary teachers, all members of this group were familiar with the school and were employed before the start of the project.

Instruments and measures

To offer the best form of evaluation of the Year 7 Project, a longitudinal study was conducted using pre-test and post-testing instruments during the two academic years of 2002-2003 and 2003-2004. Data was collected during the first term and the last few weeks of the same academic year. The same standardised tests and tasks were given to the children at the beginning and at the end of the academic year in order to assess the children's performance.

Test scores in reading and spelling, and writing samples were collected. These scores and writing samples compared the progress of the students in the four experimental classes with the control classes to establish whether the increased support for literacy attainment had improved the outcomes beyond the school's projection of 12 months.

A range of measures were utilised:

National Foundation Educational Research (NFER) Group Reading Test. The NFER reading test monitors students' progress in reading and helps identify students who require further diagnostic assessment. One of the advantages of this group test is that it is easy to administer under normal classroom conditions and takes about 30 minutes to complete. The design is non-threatening to students as they use everyday language and situations in a straightforward multiple-choice format. This group test also allows for the monitoring of students' development and progress in reading and provides Reading Ages, standardize Scores and percentiles.

P. E. Vernon Spelling Test. The spelling test was administered to all students' participants at pre-test and post-test. This test is based on the assumption that students' performance can be answered by a short list of arbitrarily selected words. The Vernon spelling test was distributed to the students under the same conditions and times. The words used in the spelling test were generated from a long list of words

⁴ PSHE – Personal Social and Health Education

⁵ Learning mentors offer academic and social support to students

⁶ Permanent exclusion represents exclusion where the head teacher's intention is that the student should no longer be educated at that school. Fixed term exclusion are periods of any length with a date for the student to return the school.

especially used for students from first year of primary school to first year of college. These words were accompanied by sentences and ranged from easiest to more difficult. Each word in the test was accompanied with a sentence using the word to be spelt by the students. Reliability coefficients reported range of around .94 of the P. E. Vernon Spelling Test (Vernon, 1977).

Writing sample. The final piece of data was an independent piece of writing completed during a Humanities lesson at the end of the first term, unlike the two tests that were collected earlier in first term and again at the end of year. The first 15-20 minutes were used to discuss the topic and allow teachers to give instructions. During this time, teachers were asked to provide a stimulus in the form of a discussion of the topic 'the creation'. The remaining 30 minutes of a 50 minute lesson was allotted for students to write a short essay on the specified topic.

Procedure

During the academic year, there were regular meetings in which all teachers in the project classes participated. In addition to these discussions, each teacher worked closely with one department of their choice within the school. These meetings and collaboration with other departments prepared the teachers to effectively deliver the new curriculum to all students.

Students in the experimental group were exposed to an adapted curriculum. By eliminating the modern foreign language requirement, an increased number of periods were made available for English lessons. During the academic year, students' literacy levels and progress were measured at the beginning and the end of the year. The first session focused on reading and spelling tests which were administered in September and October respectively. This was followed by a writing sample which was collected in December. During the second stage of data collection (June) students' literacy levels were again tested to allow measuring their progress during the academic year. By this time students were more relaxed in school and familiar with the teaching and learning strategies.

Preliminary results and findings

The pre- and post- tests allowed for measuring literacy progress of students in four experimental classes with those in the four control classes to explore whether the added literacy and support has improved literacy of the at risk students. One of the aims of the Year 7 Project in collaboration with the tutor of the SRA reading scheme was to raise students reading and spelling age by at least one year.

To measure the degree to which students' literacy levels improved, spelling and reading tests were given at the beginning and end of the academic year. Each of the tests were scored using the specified standardization provided with each test. Along with the results from these tests, a writing sample was collected and analysed at the beginning and end of the academic year. Means and standard deviations on all measures are presented in Table 1 for both the experimental and control group.

When examining the change of spelling ages from pre-treatment to post-treatment T-tests revealed no statistically significant differences between groups. Statistical significant differences were only found on the progress between groups. Table 1 demonstrates that students in the experimental group showed more progress over the academic year than the control group (Exp. 13.1, SD 30.2; Cont. 9.8, SD 30.5).

The range of spelling ages in months for the experimental group was 72-150 for pre-test and 76-170 for the post-test. The control group's range for pre-test was 89-172 and post- test 18-186. It is suggested that due to the added literacy lessons and added support, students who were reading far below the average made remarkable improvements during the academic year.

The results from the NFER comprehension test at the beginning of the year reported that 142 out of 220 (65%) students tested were reading below the reading age of 11 while only 78 (35%) students were reading above the reading age of eleven. Of the 142 reading below average, 96 (68%) were students from the experimental group.

There were significant differences in progress between the groups ($p < 0.05$). The change in progress in months by the end of the year, as shown in Table 1, was higher in the experimental group rather than the control group (Exp 15.5, SD 9.5; Cont. 12.4, SD 11.7). While the project was concerned with raising the literacy levels in this group of at risk students, it is seen that these students made a mean progress of 15 months while the control group progressed by 12 months (1yr).

Although differences between the group reading age means were not statistically significant, when progress was calculated, these were found to be significant ($p < 0.05$). When the pre-treatment scores were analysed, the T-test revealed no significant difference between the groups on any of the testing instruments.

Along with the standardised reading and spelling tests, samples of students' writing were collected. Although writing samples were collected from all students, for the purposes of this paper preliminary findings a small random sample of 48 (21 boys and 28 girls) scripts were selected. These were analysed using the Qualification Curriculum Assessment (QCA)⁷ guidelines. Of the 48 students sampled, 43 (24 from experimental and 19 from control) used simple sentences. By the end of the year, 20 students (ten from each group) wrote with simple sentences. Fourteen of the 24 students in the experimental group showed improvements in their writing and were using less simple sentences. However, only nine students in the control group made progress in sentence structure. In addition to this improvement,

⁷ QCA guidelines are used to assess children's writing at the end of Key Stage 2 (age 11 yrs). The assessment focuses on grammar, syntax and, demarcation.

students in the experimental classes showed an increased command of using demarcation, paragraphing and syntax than the control group. Overall, by the end of the year both groups did make progress. Analysis of the writing samples is ongoing.

Table 1 Pre-test and Post-test Achievement scores

| Measures | Experimental | | | | Control | | | |
|----------------------|--------------|---------|-------------|---------|-------------|---------|-------------|---------|
| | Pre (n=74) | | Post (n=82) | | Pre (n=95) | | Post (n=99) | |
| | Mean (mths) | SD | Mean (mths) | SD | Mean (mths) | SD | Mean (mths) | SD |
| NFER Reading | 108.32 | (22.03) | 123.90 | (19.74) | 129.52 | (19.87) | 142.44 | (15.84) |
| Progress | | | 15.46 | (9.46) | | | 12.38 | (11.67) |
| P.E. Vernon Spelling | 108.42 | (18.91) | 121.43 | (23.13) | 131.59 | (18.39) | 141.26 | (25.22) |
| Progress | | | 13.16 | (30.17) | | | 9.85 | (30.55) |

Discussion and conclusion

Although many researchers and educationalists are concerned with students at this developmental stage, a gap exists in exploring whether, and how transfer and transition processes affect literacy learning and more importantly, ways to improve literacy learning of at risk students during the transfer and transition process.

This paper outlined some preliminary evaluation findings of a school-based project addressing literacy learning during the transfer and transition from primary to secondary school. More specifically, this paper addressed the following question: would implementing a highly structured literacy project with a changed curriculum and primary school pedagogic style effectively increase the literacy scores of 'at risk' students in Year 7?

Data collected and analyzed revealed that students' literacy levels in the experimental group improved, especially considering that many of the students in the experimental group started at considerably lower literacy levels than their peers in the control group.

The achievement data revealed that a highly structured literacy project using a primary school pedagogic style of teaching and adapting the curriculum effectively increased literacy levels of 'at risk' year 7 students. There were significant differences found in both reading and spelling tests.

In an effort to improve the learning outcomes of its students, the evaluation of this project demonstrates how school managers are often faced with difficult and immediate decisions on how best to support their students within the realities of imperfect research conditions and limited resources.

In any attempt to design similar projects in the future, three groups of students rather than the two groups evaluated in the London school project would allow for better comparative analysis of literacy learning through the intervention. That is, there would ideally be two groups of 'at risk' students. One 'at risk' student group would receive the project interventions consisting of the changed curriculum and pedagogic style. The second 'at risk' student group would have followed the standard year 7 curriculum to better assess the extent that such 'at risk' students can or cannot access the standard year 7 curricula. The third group would be a group of higher ability students that would also follow the standard Year 7 curriculum.

Nevertheless, the preliminary findings revealed that although the groups were disparate in their initial literacy abilities, there was progress in both groups but the experimental group showed a relatively higher rate of progress by the end of the academic year. The school management were happy enough with the learning outcomes produced by the project that they have continued the intervention in subsequent intakes of year 7 students to date. This also suggests that such an intervention is sustainable within the existing school setting and resource allocation.

Further research could be useful in examining whether students in the experimental group felt stigmatised while being a part of the project. Moreover, an assessment as to whether the project eased the psycho-social aspects of transfer and transition, and/or simply delayed them, would be helpful. Generally, future research is encouraged to assess student perspectives of transfer and transition among 'at risk' students.

Modalities such as curriculum and pedagogic styles to improve literacy learning during the transfer and transition to secondary school should continue to be explored in different educational contexts. It is contested that the 'at risk' students of this project represent a larger, or at least growing, number of students than existing literature suggests, especially in light of increasing migration and socio-economic diversity among school populations.

Appendix 7 - Quantitative data analysis of reading scores

Introduction

This section addresses the third subsidiary question raised in this research, “Does the implementation of a structured literacy and transition project accompanied by a changed curriculum and primary-school pedagogic style increase reading scores and help pupils settle into Year 7?” This chapter presents quantitative data on which the analyses in Chapters 6 and 7 draw.

Quantitative data were collected at the beginning and end of the Year 7 Project using the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) Group Reading Test for 6-12 year olds. The purpose was to assess the impact of the project on pupil reading progress. Whilst this thesis as a whole is concerned with pupil and teaching staff perceptions of the transition to secondary school, it is useful to present data on literacy progress in order to explore the extent to which the Year 7 Project impacted on pupil reading scores in the first year of secondary school.

Pupil participants

The participants included all pupils entering Erin Saint Clair Secondary School (ESSS) Year 7 in 2003-04. These pupils transferred from five primary feeder schools and many received free school meals. In addition the majority of pupils spoke more than one language which meant English was not their first language. At the beginning of the school year, the entire cohort of 186 pupils (99 pupils from the project group of classes and 87 from the control group of classes) was assessed using the NFER Group Reading Test for 6-12 year olds. The same test was administered at the end of the school year. However, natural attrition resulted in a reduced number of pupils taking both pre- and post-tests. At the end of the school year there were 169 pupils (82 from the project class and 87 from the control group of classes) who sat the test. This decline was due to some pupils being absent for either of the testing days, other pupils having transferred to another school or educational facility and exclusions.

The school provided information about the pupils including Standard Assessment Tasks results, Special Educational Needs status, languages spoken and levels of fluency and whether pupils had behavioural problems. Within the total Year 7 population of 186 pupils, there were 18 languages other than English spoken. Of these pupils, 77% were English as Additional Language speakers while 23% spoke English as their first language. However, within the control group of 99 pupils, 33% spoke English as their first language while 67% spoke a language other than English as their first language. Within the project group of 87 pupils, 17% spoke English as their first language while 83% spoke a language other than English as their first language.

Instrument and measures

As discussed in Chapter 6, the NFER reading test was administered to pupils at the beginning and end of Year 7. The NFER-Nelson Group Reading Test 6-12 (NFER-Nelson 1985) assesses pupil reading levels and helps identify pupils who require further diagnostic assessment. The test consists of 48 multiple-choice items, beginning with picture recognition and progressing to sentence completion. Five words are given for each item with the pupil circling their preferred answer. A correct answer is given a score of one. For the whole test there is a minimum score of 0 and a maximum score of 48. One of the advantages of this group test is that it is easy to administer under normal classroom conditions and takes about 30 minutes to complete. The test was also easy to mark and the researcher had the task of marking the test using the guide that accompanied the test. The design is non-threatening to pupils as the test uses everyday language and situations in a straightforward multiple-choice format. This group test also allows for the monitoring of pupil development and progress in reading and provides reading ages, standardised scores and percentiles. The test has been widely used and has good reliability and validity (NFER-Nelson 1985).

Results and findings

This section of the chapter discusses the results and findings of the NFER reading test that was administered at the beginning and end of Year 7. The average age of pupils on entry to ESSS was 11 years 7 months and their English SAT scores at the end of Key Stage 2 indicated poorer than average levels of English when compared with the national average. In 2003/4, 63% of pupils entering Year 7 had achieved Level 4 literacy score as opposed to the national average of 75% of pupils having attained Level 4 literacy. This can be attributed to the high percentage of pupils who speak English as an Additional Language. This gap in achievement prompted the senior management team at ESSS to implement the Year 7 Project to support these pupils with their literacy learning as part of the transition to secondary school.

Pre- and post-test comparisons

There was a substantial correlation between pre- and post-test reading scores on the NFER reading test (Spearman's $\rho = .744$, $p < .001$) as revealed in Table 7.1.

| Group | | Reading age in years at pre-test stage (at beginning of year) | Reading age in years at post-test stage (at the end of the year) |
|---------------|------|---|--|
| Control group | Mean | 13.1 | 14.7 |
| | N | 87 | 87 |
| | SD | 2.0 | 1.3 |
| Project group | Mean | 10.3 | 11.9 |
| | N | 82 | 82 |
| | SD | 2.3 | 2.3 |
| Total | Mean | 11.8 | 13.3 |
| | N | 169 | 169 |
| | SD | 2.6 | 2.3 |

Table 7.1 Reading ages in years at the beginning and end of the academic year, for project and control groups

(Note: N represents number of pupils. SD represents standard deviation)

Table 7.1 shows reading ages at the beginning and end of the academic year for the project and control group pupils in the Year 7 Project. The average reading age of the control group pupils at the beginning of the year was 13.1 years, whereas the average reading age of the project group pupils was 10.3 years. This difference, which is statistically significant at the .01 level ($t=8.554$, $df=167$), confirms the decision of the school to establish the Year 7 Project and divide the cohort of pupils between the project and control groups of classes. The profile

of Key Stage 2 SATs scores also supported the division of pupils between the project and control groups of classes.

By the end of the academic year, both groups had made significant improvements, with an average reading gain of 1.6 years (control group, mean gain in reading age = 1.57, sd = 1.82; project group, mean gain in reading age = 1.56, sd = 1.65). Table 7.2 presents the results of a regression analysis, where the dependent variable is post-test reading. Pre-test reading is entered in the first block of a fixed entry regression model and intervention condition in the second block. Both pre-test reading and intervention conditions are significantly associated with post-test reading scores. As seen above, there is a highly significant relationship between pre- and post-test reading (standardised beta=.753, $p < .001$). Although the two groups made the same amount of progress, group membership appears as a significant predictor of reading at the post-test stage, with the project group performing less well than the control group (standardised beta= -.296, where the control group are coded 0 and the project group 1). A comparison of the groups in terms of gains scores reveals no statistical difference. Thus, the statistically significant beta value identified in the regression is an artefact of the strong relationship between group membership and pre-test reading. Membership of the project group which received added class support and reading enrichment did not lead to greater progress in reading when compared with the control group which followed the regular Year 7 curriculum.

| Model | Unstandardised coefficients | | Standardised coefficients | t | Sig |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 (Constant) | 5.43 | .548 | | 9.9 | .001 |
| Reading age pre-test | .672 | .045 | .753 | 14.77 | .001 |
| 2 (Constant) | 7.81 | .685 | | 11.4 | .001 |
| Reading age post-test | .526 | .051 | .589 | 10.37 | .001 |
| | -1.366 | .262 | -.296 | -5.21 | .001 |

a. Dependent variable: reading age post

Table 7.2: Regression analysis of group differences in post-test reading scores, controlling for pre-test scores

In interpreting the similarity in reading test gains between the two groups, a “ceiling effect” was reached on the reading post-test in the control group which should be taken into consideration. An inspection of the standard deviations of the mean scores at post-test (Table 7.2) shows that the standard deviation for the control group was substantially lower (1.3) than for the project group (2.3).

The final findings in this thesis is in line with the preliminary findings. The findings included data from reading and spelling tests and writing samples which revealed that although the groups were disparate in their initial literacy abilities, there was progress in both groups but the project group showed a relatively higher rate of progress by the end of the academic year. The school management were happy enough with the learning outcomes produced by the project that they have continued the intervention in subsequent intakes of Year 7 pupils to date. This also suggests that such an intervention is sustainable within the existing school setting and resource allocation (Brown 2005).

Discussion and conclusion

Many researchers and educationalists are concerned with pupils making the transition to secondary school. The main concern during this time is the gap that exists especially in literacy and how they can be supported. This chapter provides a baseline for discussion of pupil literacy in this thesis and acts as a supplement to the next two qualitative chapters that present an analysis of pupil perceptions of their transition experience and learning (Chapter 8) and teaching staff perceptions of the Year 7 Project (Chapter 9). More specifically, this

chapter has addressed the following question: “Does the implementation of a structured literacy and transition project accompanied by a changed curriculum and primary-school pedagogic style increase reading scores and help pupils settle into Year 7?”

Analysis of the collected statistical data revealed that pupil literacy levels in the project group improved. This finding is especially important when considering that many of the pupils in the project group of classes started at considerably lower literacy levels than their peers in the control group. The results gathered from the reading tests revealed that a structured literacy and transition project using a primary school pedagogic style of teaching and adapting the curriculum effectively increased the reading levels of “at-risk” Year 7 pupils.

In an effort to improve the learning outcomes of pupils at ESSS, this evaluation of the literacy strand of the Year 7 Project demonstrates how school managers, who are often faced with difficult and immediate decisions on how best to support their pupils within the realities of imperfect research conditions and limited resources, can provide effective improvement strategies for their pupils.