

Research for Teachers

Transfer from the primary classroom

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For this TLA research summary we looked at a study about the effect of transfer from primary to secondary or middle schools on pupils' attitudes, progress and attainment. This is an area of great concern to teachers. Many studies have investigated this issue. The particular strength of this study is the longitudinal nature of the evidence base. Whilst all practitioners see every day evidence of the length of time it takes for educational change to happen we rarely have the opportunity to look at research that tracks effects over a long period. This study offers such an opportunity.

Despite evidence of a commitment to improve pupils' experience of transition and transfer, and efforts to do so, in many cases progress over a long timescale has been relatively restricted. We offer this summary as an important and in some ways sobering context for current efforts to address transfer. The TLA research offers intelligence that will help practitioners and managers to guard against complacency as well as insight into what they can achieve.

The researchers' interest in the effects of transfer started with a survey, some 20 years ago, called the ORACLE (Observation, Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation) project. By replicating the original study, the researchers have been able to chart changes in practice over this time period. The later research (1995-1998), published in 2002, highlights where:

- there have been changes for the better over that time period
- there are still outstanding problems
- national initiatives have had an impact for better and worse on the transition process.

The original study signalled a need to respond to deterioration in pupils' attitudes to learning and a hiatus in progress as they transferred to secondary schools. The authors note that current concerns about the effect of transfer are similar to earlier ones but the context has changed significantly, for example, with the introduction of the national curriculum.

The researchers' findings suggest that pupils in the more recent study adjusted to their new social and academic conditions better than similar pupils did 20 years ago but that there remain concerns about pupils' attitudes, motivation and attainment, particularly with more able boys, at this critical stage in their careers.

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Overview

Why is the issue important?

Transition from primary to secondary school can be an anxious time for pupils and the curriculum changes etc that occur at transfer can adversely affect pupils' attitude, motivation and academic performance.

What did the research show?

Pupils adjusted to their new social and academic conditions better than pupils did 20 years ago - they settled more quickly and worked 'harder'. While overall attainment of many pupils declined between the last year of the pre-transfer school and one year later, tests results showed that more pupils made gains and fewer pupils made losses than in similar tests 20 years earlier. So whilst the dip in attainment post-transfer persisted, fewer pupils were failing to make progress. However, pupils' disenchantment with school post-transfer was still very apparent. Few pupils in post-transfer schools, especially high attaining boys said that they were excited or stimulated by the learning experienced.

How was this achieved?

The researchers noted a number of changes that had taken place since their first study twenty years earlier, such as the induction day, which had a settling effect on pupils, particularly in social and practical matters. Another change was the move towards whole-class teaching in primary school - the approach used by secondary schools, although whole class teaching was more interactive in primary than secondary schools, where pupils had a more passive role.

But pupils' early experiences after joining their secondary schools had changed little in 20 years. In their first lessons, pupils were 'bombarded' with administrative tasks and undemanding work to keep them busy, with little curriculum focused work. In other lessons there were fewer opportunities for pupil interaction and collaboration, resulting in fewer opportunities for peer-learning or peer-mentoring in secondary schools than in primary. Curriculum continuity continued to be a challenge whilst transfer of documentation remained problematic.

How was the research designed to be trustworthy?

The researchers revisited a number of schools covered by the Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation (ORACLE) survey 20 years earlier to look at how changes in educational practice since then had affected the process of transition from primary to secondary school. Evidence was collected through carefully structured observations in the same way as in the original study. Six schools in the East Midlands were used as case study sites. Pupil performance was measured both before and after transfer, and pupils' and their parents' attitudes to the transfer process were also assessed.

What are the implications?

The study showed the importance of:

- strategies to increase pre- and post-transfer staff knowledge of the other phase, for example secondary teachers visiting

and watching primary practitioners and their pupils in action and sharing what they have learned about primary practices with colleagues

- secondary teachers capitalising on pupils' enthusiasm for their new school by, for example, setting open-ended challenges for new pupils whilst they get to know them in first days of term, rather than administrative tasks and undemanding work designed to keep them busy
- primary schools giving secondary schools a fuller understanding of particular pupils to help identify those at risk of disaffection and underachievement
- making whole-class teaching more interactive and planning more collaborative group work to increase opportunities for peer-learning at secondary level.

What do the case studies illustrate?

The case studies show:

- ways in which secondary school teachers worked with their feeder primary schools before transfer to tackle the problem of curriculum continuity and improve pupils' experiences
- how whole-class teaching was made more interactive thereby making it more effective and inclusive as a teaching strategy
- an approach that provided pace and challenge to pupils of all abilities
- how curriculum continuity in the teaching of reading was maintained between Year 6 and Year 7.

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Study

What did the researchers set out to do?

The Research Team sought to repeat the original ORACLE study as closely as circumstances would allow after a gap of 20 years. In doing so they intended to investigate whether the introduction of the national curriculum had succeeded in improving progression and continuity and also whether the curriculum reform with its attendant assessment and pedagogical initiatives had affected educational practice and pupil performance in the schools concerned.

In the more recent longitudinal study, data were collected on the attitudes, attainment and study behaviour of pupils from the last few weeks in primary school through the transfer period to their new middle or secondary school. This period covered their first contacts with the new school to their early days in each of the new schools, through to the end of the first year.

The data collection methods used by the Research Team are presented later in the summary.

Six post-transfer schools and their main feeder primary schools were selected for the recent study. The post-transfer schools were comprised of:

- two 9-13 middle schools (transfer from Year 4 to Year 5)
- two 10-14 high schools (transfer from Year 5 to Year 6)
- two 11-14 high schools (transfer from Year 6 to Year 7).

The study therefore focuses on children transferring into Years 5, 6 and 7. In the summary, the term 'post-transfer' school is used when all schools are indicated in the research and the label 'secondary' when this seemed more appropriate.

The schools were located in two local education authorities in the East Midlands of England. Of the post-

transfer schools in the original study, four were also included in the recent study. The study provided few details about the primary schools involved.

What were the main findings of the recent study of transfer from primary school?

The researchers noted that the transfer from pre-transfer to post-transfer school had a number of effects on pupils including their:

- progress and attainment
- responses to changes in teacher-pupil interaction
- attitudes and self-image.

Details about the original ORACLE project and a discussion about the differences in findings between the two studies are also presented.

How did transfer affect pupils' progress and attainment?

The researchers tested pupils using the Richmond Basic Skills Tests for language, reading and mathematics. Pupils were first tested in the summer term before transfer and at the end of the first year in the transfer school. This enabled the researchers to compare the effects of transfer and the impact of the national curriculum on attainment for pupils transferring at different ages. They were also able to compare the recent findings with those of the previous study. They found that:

- overall 40% of pupils achieved lower scores in the same three basic tests at the end of their transfer year than in the final year at their feeder schools
- pupils transferring from Year 5 to Year 6 made the most significant gains. These pupils made progress in most areas of literacy but there were no significant gains in numeracy
- pupils transferring from Year 6 to Year 7 made gains in reading and spelling but declined in use of language and mathematics
- pupils transferring from Year 4 to Year 5 made fewest gains.

The gains made by pupils transferring from Year 5 to Year 6 were attributed by the researchers to preparations for national tests at the end of Year 6.

Whilst making fewer gains than pupils transferring from year 5 to year 6, pupils transferring from year 6 to year 7 nonetheless made gains in most aspects of literacy.

For pupils transferring from year 4 to year 5 the results should be treated with caution as different forms of the same test were used on the two occasions. Based on the evidence provided it seems that these pupils made progress in language use and vocabulary only.

Irrespective of pupil gains and losses there was a remarkable degree of continuity in terms of pupils' ranking relative to the rest of the class. Pupils in primary school were described as high, medium or low ability according to their quartile scores within the class. After transfer approximately 70 % were allocated by their new school to the same quartile.

How did pupils respond to new classroom situations?

Researchers observed and recorded classroom interactions in the post-transfer schools. In the secondary schools, pupils spent much more time listening and watching the teacher. Overall, teachers spent less time interacting with individuals and groups of pupils. Pupils who were on task were highly unlikely to attract the teachers' attention. Teachers' attention was attracted by off-task or distracted behaviour. Researchers' observations also showed that boys attracted teachers' attention most when they distracted others, girls when they showed an interest in another's work or when they were daydreaming.

In post-transfer schools, there were also fewer opportunities for pupil interaction and thus fewer opportunities for peer-learning or peer-mentoring. Pupils were also less likely to try to begin or succeed in initiating conversations. The researchers observed that overall pupil-pupil talk was reduced by 10% when expressed as a proportion of all observed classroom interactions. When pupils did begin a verbal exchange, these were unlikely to be maintained for more than 25 seconds. This was found to be the case for all pupil-pupil interactions including those that were task-related.

For information about a group of maths teachers who have tackled some of these problems by using whole-class interactive teaching methods, see case study 4.

Pupils working collaboratively were found rarely in both studies. In post-transfer schools in the later study, group work occurred even less than in pre-transfer schools, time spent working individually increased at the same rate. Researchers observed that when pupils worked collaboratively on tasks they spent more time on task-related talk than non-task-related talk. They also found that task-related interactions increased with the size of the team.

In all the schools in the study classroom organisation had an effect on pupils' concentration. The researchers found that concentration was greatest in wholeclass settings and least when pupils were on their own. However, peer interaction between pupils was most frequent:

- in primary schools when pupils sat in pairs
- in secondary schools when pupils worked in groups.

The effects on pupils' attitudes and self-image

The Research Team noted that the move from pre-transfer to post-transfer school had a number of effects on pupils including:

- pupils' anticipation of their new school
- changes in pupils' attitudes arising from induction days
- changes in pupils' self-image after transfer.

In the final term of their pre-transfer school and before the pupils had visited their new school, the researchers surveyed pupils' attitudes about what they most and least looked forward to. Their findings included that:

- for girls, making new friends was the most important issue, whereas for boys, it only ranked third
- for boys, sport and PE were highly anticipated, but were only ranked fourth by girls
- low achieving pupils of both genders were particularly concerned about being bullied
- overall, pupils' worries focused on academic demands particularly of English or mathematics in the new school.

On induction day visits boys were more likely to mix with boys from other primary schools, eg, to play football. Girls were observed staying in their primary school groupings and not mixing with other pupils. Concerns about friendships or finding their way around their new school remained after the induction visit, but only a few pupils were still anxious about bullying, work or school routines.

The researchers concluded that transfer was accompanied by an increase in pupils' general self-image, while academic self-image hardly changed. Boys' general self-image changed more than that of girls. Lower attaining boys made the greatest gains in general self-image, possibly because they became part of a 'counter-culture' within the school. The biggest decline in the higher attaining group was in boys' positive attitudes to schools and motivation to learn. Whilst higher attaining pupils initially made gains in self-image these gains were not maintained.

Readers may wish to learn about approaches taken to tackle passive disaffection among pupils in the Norwich area. The relevant information is in a case study in the RfT summary 'Positive alternatives to exclusion'.

Readers may also be interested in the case study that describes approaches to overcome disaffection and demotivation among boys, in the summary 'An investigation into gender differences in achievement'.

What issues did the transfer study raise?

The researchers highlighted a number of concerns teachers had about transfer, including:

- the danger of pupils disengaging with learning after transfer
- the inference that secondary schools did not live up to pupils' expectations. transfer lacks significance in many pupils' minds
- the discontinuity in the curriculum
- the complicating effect of competition between schools.

Pupils growing disenchantment with school was a major observation in this research. Few pupils in post-transfer schools said that they were excited or stimulated by the learning experienced.

Some pupils interviewed were pragmatic about the matter and said that they participated in school because they 'needed an education'. Of concern was the finding that the biggest decline in attitude and motivation was in the higher attaining group, particularly boys. The researchers suggest that this may be partly due to the amount of non-interactive whole-class teaching the pupils received in the secondary schools compared with primary schools.

However, some secondary teachers have specifically set out to make mathematics whole-class teaching approaches interactive and readers may wish to look at what they did in case study 4.

Transfer from primary school to the next school marks a 'status passage' from childhood to young adulthood that does not seem to live up to young peoples' expectations.

Whilst induction programmes had helped to ease pupils' concerns about the social and practical aspects of transfer, the researchers found that professional dialogue about the curriculum between the teachers was not working effectively. Greater parental choice was found to have worsened these situations by increasing the likelihood that pupils from one primary school would transfer to many different schools. The resulting complexity of communication made liaison about pupils, the curriculum and assessment more costly and difficult to manage.

Curriculum continuity continued to be a challenge. Further evidence for this was provided in a survey by Suffolk LEA (1997) which reported serious discrepancies between the work that pupils were given before and after transfer - sometimes tasks were at two level descriptors below the standard reached in their primary school. Reports by the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority (1996) point to similar problems.

For an insight into how primary and secondary teachers in a London Borough attempted to begin the process of maintaining curriculum continuity, see case study 2.

How effectively did schools manage the transfer process?

The researchers looked at the way in which schools prepared for induction of pupils both before and at transfer. They observed that:

- liaison about pupils was mainly administrative
- a whole induction day spent in the destination school was the most effective way of reducing pupils' anxiety about transfer
- schools' acclimatisation of new pupils varied greatly in quality.

How did schools organise for liaison and induction?

There were several features in common in the schools arrangements for the transfer of pupils between schools. For instance, all cross-phase liaison programmes had the following characteristics:

- Teacher visits to the pre-transfer schools.
- Pupil tours of the post-transfer schools.
- Parents' evenings in post-transfer schools.
- Pupils spent a working day in the post-transfer school.
- Teachers from destination schools teach at pre-transfer schools.

Special Needs Co-ordinators passed on information about SEN pupils.

There were well-established meetings between headteachers and visits by liaison co-ordinators but the researchers highlighted some issues about liaison in tackling the problem of curriculum continuity..

The Research Team observed that induction days seemed to work well in making pupils feel more comfortable about their destination school. They also reported that some schools were trying to be more creative about the induction process. For example, one school introduced an extended induction programme by delaying the start of the timetable. They used this time to cover tasks that would be duplicated by many teachers such as writing names on books. Another took a more flexible approach to the first few weeks of term as it helped pupils become independent in their new surroundings and to develop study and coping strategies.

All schools had established settling in routines for the start of the new school term following transfer. In comparison with the previous study of 20 years ago, the authors felt that little had changed in the schools' arrangements for pupils' first few days in secondary school. The researchers observed a close similarity in the approaches taken by all the schools in the study. Whilst recognising that such procedures were necessary they concluded that the demands on pupils in this period lacked challenge and interest.

How did the induction day help allay pupils' fears?

The 'induction day' in the summer term was an addition to the transfer process of 20 years ago and did help remove pupils' anxieties about their new school.

Schools appeared to have two objectives for their induction days:

- to put children at ease and allay their fears about the new school
- to signify that secondary school was different, and not like the primary school that they were leaving behind.

Observations of the induction days in the six schools revealed several common features:

- an initial meeting with the headteachers
- curricular activities, eg, science, mathematics, music, etc.
- social activities, eg, ice-breakers, name learning games, 'getting to know you'
- an introduction to routines and procedures, eg, break and lunchtimes, tours of the school
- an introduction to classroom administrative procedures, eg, dinner money, time with form teacher.

The researchers felt that through induction pupils experienced something of the specialist nature of the secondary curriculum and gained a sense of the size and geography of the buildings. Critically, for many children, they also tried out the school dinners, explored the play areas and located the toilets.

One secondary school recognised the needs of particular groups of pupils. It held a pre-induction day for pupils from small primary schools and those with special educational needs.

Generally speaking, the researchers found that the philosophy of the school presented on induction day was reasonably accurate. Evidence from November surveys of pupils indicated that the overall perceptions that the

children took away with them after the induction day were found to be fulfilled on arrival in the autumn term.

What did schools do to settle new pupils into school routines?

Whole school assembly

During the first few days, researchers found that all schools held a whole school assembly. This event was a largely adult led affair with the new pupils in a passive role. The Research Team contrasted this with the participatory format of the primary school assembly. In all schools, the headteachers' address to the new school intake covered a range of themes including:

- 'what this school is about'
- the role of education
- the importance of community
- rights and responsibilities
- the structures that enable the school to operate.

The difference between schools was evident in the messages about the educational philosophy that underpinned the culture of the school.

First sessions with form teachers

The researchers found that the first classroom session was noticeably similar in most the schools studied. This was the pupils' chance to settle in with their form teacher. During this time, the authors observed that pupils were:

- 'bombarded' with information about routines and rules
- issued with homework diaries
- set the task of copying out their timetables.

In the researchers' opinion, teachers made few genuine attempts to find out about pupils or to encourage pupil-to-pupil interaction.

First lessons with subject teachers

The aim of the first lessons in each subject was to familiarise pupils with the routines imposed by the individual teachers. Whilst recognising the need for some administration the observations suggested that the demand on pupils at this time were excessively passive. The researchers made a number of critical observations including:

- pupils' engagement in unchallenging activities involving dictation or copying out rules and in designing covers for folders
- lack of curriculum focused work
- the use in some schools of formal testing, in order to group pupils by ability.

What problems arose over liaison?

Documentation

Transfer of documentation about pupils and the curriculum still appeared to be a problem for schools. The researchers found that lack of information inhibited the school to which the pupils were transferring from planning effectively for the new intake. One pyramid of schools was found to be tackling this issue by planning collaboratively about the documents to be passed on, their contents and delivery dates.

Teaching styles

Overall, the researchers found that teachers from the two phases had little knowledge about each other's approaches to teaching and a lack of trust in each other's judgements about standards. One secondary school and its feeder schools had set up liaison meetings between Year 7 tutors and primary Year 6 tutors. The meeting aimed to give staff the opportunity to get to know each other, set dates for Head of Year 7 visits to primary schools and to provide feedback on the previous years' intake. The meetings provided useful points of contact but the researchers observed that there was a noticeable lack of mutual regard; secondary teachers adopted an air of superiority over their primary colleagues.

In one school, efforts were made to identify areas of curriculum overlap in the teaching and learning of English. Readers may wish to see some of the details that are presented in case study 5.

Opportunities for teachers to meet about curriculum

The Research Team found that there were few opportunities for teachers from primary and secondary schools to have face-to-face meetings about the curriculum and assessment. Another secondary school hosted curriculum continuity meetings for teachers organised around subjects. The researchers' independent observations suggested that the clash of values and cultures between primary and secondary schools in these meetings limited their effectiveness.

The researchers concluded that these liaison opportunities were a step forward from arrangements for transfer of 20 years ago but they still have some way to go to be fully effective.

To find out about schools working together to improve the transfer process read case study 1.

What were pupils' experiences of teaching in pretransfer and post-transfer schools?

The researchers investigated a number of features of classroom teaching including:

- the level of teacher interaction with individual pupils
- teaching styles
- the amount of teacher talk.

In post-transfer schools, the authors' findings included that:

- the main teaching strategy was setting pupils to do exercises from textbooks or specially prepared worksheets
- there were few opportunities for group discussion
- the tasks set were often not challenging and had only a low level of difficulty
- some pupils engaged in 'easy riding'
- pupils were often asked to write information, which was displayed on the board, into their rough books and to make a fair copy for homework.

Overall, pupils' experiences of teaching were better in pre-transfer than posttransfer schools. The pace and challenge of tasks in the primary classroom were observed to be greater with more pupil-pupil and teacher-pupil activity.

A greater level of teacher interaction with the whole class and less teacher interaction with individual pupils was found in post-transfer than pre-transfer schools. In primary schools, the researchers observed teachers spending more time with individuals.

Whilst primary school classrooms still show more interactive forms of teaching styles, teaching styles have become more similar in pre-transfer and posttransfer schools with an increased emphasis on whole-class teaching.

In both pre-transfer and post-transfer schools, teachers' talk dominated with few opportunities for interactive teaching. In post-transfer schools, teachers gave information, instructions, and asked questions pitched at a

low level. In pretransfer schools, teachers gave more feedback to individuals about their work. In secondary schools, the researchers observed the relatively small amount of questioning contributed to only a modest level of cognitive challenge.

To make learning more cognitively challenging many schools have adopted Thinking Skills approaches. For an example of such an approach see case study 3 and also our earlier RfT, Improving learning through cognitive intervention which summarises the Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education (CASE) programme of cognitive acceleration.

What needs to be done to improve the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school?

The researchers suggested improvements, which can, potentially, be implemented by schools and teachers. They also make other recommendations that require changes in the national curriculum and the assessment structure that are not listed here. The researchers suggested a number of improvements including:

- listening to what pupils have to say about transfer
- making information about pupils' attainment more accessible to teachers in secondary schools by collating and passing on information about primary pupils' attitudes, motivation and behaviour
- making available more details about primary pupils' cultural and social experiences
- making pupils' experiences of secondary school sufficiently different from primary school to help mark the status passage of becoming a young adolescent
- establishing extended induction programmes in the first week of the new term
- ensuring pupils' expectations of more challenging learning experiences are fulfilled.

The researchers believe that listening to pupils' views about the transfer process schools would help schools identify areas for improvement.

Providing secondary teachers with greater detail about pupils' attainment would help them match work set to the appropriate level of difficulty, the authors suggest. Information about pupils' attitudes, motivation and behaviour would make it easier for secondary schools to identify pupils at risk of failure, disaffection or underachievement.

Teachers in post-transfer schools would benefit from more knowledge about the social and cultural environment in the feeder schools, in the opinion of the researchers. For example, pupils from smaller schools are likely to have different social and cultural experiences from those in larger schools.

The researchers believe that extended induction programmes in the first week of the new school term could help pupils settle in more quickly and reduce the amount of, largely administrative, repetition in first lessons. They suggest that a focus such as 'becoming a professional learner' could initiate a programme that aimed to develop study and coping skills in pupils. Further, this programme could help pupils build new and productive relationships with each other so peer networks become established.

Teaching methods need to engage, motivate and challenge pupils. Schools, the researchers suggest, could look at teaching methods particularly those involving group or teamwork and other interactive approaches.

How was the research carried out?

The researchers' intentions were to compare the curriculum, the way teachers delivered it and the manner in which the pupils responded to teaching before and after transfer during the period 1995 to 1998. They also compared these findings where possible with the findings of the 1975 to 1976 study. Some methods used for data collection in the earlier study were replicated and some new ones were used as well.

The primary focus for data collection was pupils, before and after transfer, their perceptions, attitudes, behaviour, attainment and experiences. They collected material about the arrangements between schools for liaison over transfer of information about pupils and the curriculum and the planned transfer programme for

pupils to provide a background to the pupils' experiences. Finally data was collected about teachers and teaching in pre-transfer and post-transfer schools.

The researchers used a number of data sources including:

- school documentation
- observations
- questionnaires
- pupil attainment data.

One frequently used method was observation, which was used to focus on what went on in classrooms and during whole school activities involving either pupils or teachers or both.

Questionnaires were used to gather data about pupils' attitudes about their general and academic self-image in the present study only. Pupils completed them in the June before transfer, the November after transfer and in June at the end of the first year in the transfer school.

Data on pupils' attainment was collected using tests for basic skills in the summer term pre-transfer, in the autumn term after transfer and at the end of the first year in the transfer school. Richmond Basic Skills Tests for mathematics, language and reading were used in both earlier and later studies. These results were charted to cover the transfer period and used to compare attainment pre and post-transfer and with the earlier study.

Pupils were also given the opportunity to respond in an open-ended way before and after induction. This approach offered the researchers a means to analyse pupils' positive and negative feelings about transfer.

How did the researchers define 'transition' and 'transfer'?

The researchers define the process of transfer as the movement of a whole yeargroup of pupils from one school to another. They point out that transfer affects large numbers of pupils each year, most of whom are anxious about coping with life in the new school, the demands of new teachers and making new friends and losing others. Transition is defined by the researchers as the movement from one year-group to the next within the same school and was not the focus of their study. In the report, the receiving school at transfer is frequently referred to as the 'transfer school', or, in some cases, the 'post-transfer school' and the primary school as the 'pre-transfer school'. The researchers also refer to post-transfer classrooms as 'transfer classrooms'.

The researchers described the many ages at which pupils of statutory school age could move school. At the minimum pupils have one move from 5-11 primary schools to 11-18 secondary schools. Some pupils experience two moves, the first from infant or first school to junior or middle school with a second transfer to secondary or upper school.

What was the ORACLE project?

The ORACLE (Observation, Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation) transfer study (1975 - 80) followed the progress of pupils in their last two years in primary feeder school and through the first year of their new school. The main focus of the ORACLE study was the curriculum; the way teachers taught it and how the pupils responded. Pupils' academic performance was tested in the final term before leaving primary school and again at the end of the first year after transfer. Attitude inventories and a questionnaire measuring anxiety levels were also administered in the June before transfer, then in November and again the following June after transfer. In this way, the pattern of anxiety levels could be measured. Through focused observations, targeted pupils were followed over the course of a day at regular intervals throughout the transfer year.

What did the original study find out about what went on in classrooms in the 1970s?

Some prominent features of the 1970's transfer classroom were:

- 'silent interaction', eg, silent marking, where the teachers sat alongside individual pupils and read and marked their work with occasional instant feedback concerning a correct spelling or appropriate use of grammar
- the use of challenging and open-ended questioning
- a high degree of teacher talk of a cognitively low level.

The study found that little attempt was made to maintain continuity between the two phases in either curriculum content or teaching methods. For the most part teachers started again from scratch either as a form of revision or because it was assumed that what went on in primary school was not serious or disciplined work. This led to able children becoming bored by repeating work, while slower learners often found the pace too fast.

Subjects encountered for the first time posed particular problems. For example, pupils' prior perceptions of science and the reality were a different and often disappointing experiences.

It appeared that pupils' attitude to learning was established early in primary school, but pupils modified their behaviour to suit the different teaching approaches. In the secondary school they soon learnt to adjust their behaviour to cope with different subjects and teaching styles.

The researchers in the original ORACLE project identified different ways in which pupils slowed down their rate of work. Some primary pupils indulged in what the researchers termed 'intermittent working' - when the teacher's attention was engaged elsewhere they indulged in off-task conversations.

When they transferred schools most pupils experienced different, predominantly whole-class teaching methods. Researchers found that the 'intermittent workers' developed a new strategy called 'easy riding' where they gave the appearance of working, while actually doing as little as possible, ie, spending a lot of time ruling margins, underlining answers, writing in large script. In this way, they avoided doing tasks that are more challenging.

In contrast, the researchers identified other pupils who remained on task and were very difficult to distract. In primary school, these pupils were called the 'undeflected workers', a group who remained on task and refused to be distracted by others sitting on their table. Secondary schools also had 'hard grinders' who were difficult to distract.

What was different about pupils' attainment and attitude in the recent study?

Researchers found that pupils who transfer today were 'harder' working and settled more quickly. In comparison to 20 years ago:

- task oriented behaviour had doubled to 70%
- more pupils were found to be on task
- girls' levels of high task related behaviours increased
- fewer boys maintained high task related behaviours.

While overall attainment of many pupils had declined between the last year of the pre-transfer school and one year later, numeracy tests results showed that more pupils made gains and fewer pupils made losses than in similar tests 20 years ago. Further, for pupils transferring into Years 6 and 7, the overall average percentages of pupils failing to make progress were:

- 40% in reading
- 25% in mathematics
- 32% in language.

These figures compare with 40% to 45% in each case in the original ORACLE study. It seems that, while the

dip in attainment post-transfer persists, fewer pupils are failing to make progress compared with 20 years ago.

The researchers noted the changes in teaching style in the primary schools. More recently they found that primary classrooms had become much more similar to their secondary counterparts with an increased emphasis on wholeclass teaching. This observation contrasted with the marked difference 20 years ago when there was much more individual teaching in primary schools than secondary. However, it is important to distinguish between whole-class teaching in secondary schools, in which the pupils have a passive role, and whole-class teaching in primary schools, which is usually more interactive.

The researchers regarded the induction day as an improvement over what had happened 20 years earlier. They observed its settling effect on pupils particularly in social and practical matters.

What has been the effect of the national curriculum?

From the beginning, the researchers claimed that secondary teachers dominated the national curriculum debate of the 1980s leading to a pre-occupation with their concerns about continuity. As a result, in the programme of study for each subject the subject content, previously only taught in secondary school, was filtered down into primary schools. In primary schools, the resulting emphasis on subject knowledge and terminology increased the already heavy workload of primary teachers.

The introduction of primary school 'league tables' meant that more time was allocated to improving pupils test scores, sometimes, the researchers suggest, with inflated results. Pupils' test results that could have helped teachers in transfer schools to match pupils' levels of attainment were not used effectively.

While acknowledging that improvements have been made in primary schools in the attainments of pupils in literacy and numeracy the researchers point to the resulting more limited curriculum where Arts subjects, for example, receive inadequate coverage. They call for greater integration of core skills in other subjects thereby promoting challenging inter -disciplinary work. They point to recent reforms in Hong Kong and Singapore as examples of where this approach has been introduced.

The research highlights a difficult dilemma for secondary schools: the issue of encouraging specialisation while maintaining entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum. This, coupled with the rigid structures of secondary schools, makes change difficult. The researchers call for a radical re-thinking of the secondary school curriculum and suggest that ideas such as the modular curriculum in which pupils complete a minimum core and then pursue options that are matched to their interests be re-examined. This would require some flexibility in year 7 and year 8 perhaps organising them as one unit rather than two separate entities.

Implications for practice

The study indicated that secondary schools have done much over the past 20 years to ease prospective pupils' fears about school transfer, but that pupil attitudes to school can decline after joining, especially amongst high attaining boys.

Teachers may wish to consider the following implications of the findings of this research:

- The study found that in some instances, the effectiveness of liaison between pre- and post-transfer schools was reduced by a lack of knowledge of the other phase. What mechanisms does your cross-phase liaison programme use to improve two-way learning between primary and secondary school staff? If few secondary teachers can visit and watch primary practitioners and their pupils in action, how can those that do so best share their learning with colleagues who can't?
- Some secondary teachers in the study tended to underestimate the capabilities of primary pupils, leading them to set unchallenging work for new pupils. How quickly can you capitalise on pupils' enthusiasm for their new school? To what extent do you set open ended challenges for your new pupils whilst you get to know them?
- Although structured discussion can help learning, the study found that pupils spent less time working collaboratively and more time working individually after transfer to secondary school. Could you plan more collaborative group work to increase opportunities for peer-learning?

Head teachers and senior staff may wish to consider the following:

- One school in the study held a pre-induction day for pupils from small schools and those who had special educational needs. When planning induction procedures for pupils new to the school, how might your team best accommodate the needs of more vulnerable pupils? What measures could you use to identify them in good time? Would it help to discuss pupils' academic and social characteristics with their primary school form teachers?
- Pupils' early experiences after joining their secondary schools had changed little in 20 years: in their first lessons, pupils were 'bombaraded' with administrative tasks and undemanding work to keep them busy, with little curriculum focused work. The researchers suggested that a longer induction period, including a study skills module and time to get to know peers and staff, could help. What can you do in your school to decrease administrative burdens and increase the focus on learning in the first days of term?
- The study highlighted that post transfer schools might need a fuller understanding of particular pupils to help identify those at risk of disaffection and underachievement. Could you use primary form teachers' knowledge of their pupils and ask them to identify pupils who might be at risk and why?

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Case studies

The following case studies, which are adjuncts to the main study, offer some insights into ways of tackling the problems of transfer between schools in England and Wales.

Improving pupils' experiences of teaching and learning and attainment during transfer from primary to secondary schools

This case study helps to show how closer liaison before transfer can improve pupils' experiences of transfer.

A group of headteachers in Hillingdon recognised the differences in teaching and learning experienced by pupils from their schools when they transferred from primary to secondary school. Primary schools and a secondary school worked together to improve pupils' learning experiences. They identified issues related to teaching, assessment and school organisation as well as the need to gather information about pupils' attitudes. As a result, they introduced some major changes in the content of the information exchanged about pupils. They have found ways of familiarising pupils with secondary subject teaching and teachers with pupils' attainment before leaving primary school.

Positive outcomes from the initiative

- Before the summer break Year 7 teachers from the post-transfer school have direct experience of what pupils can achieve prior to the summer break.
- Experimental teaching across primary and secondary schools took place, for example, in modern foreign languages.
- A baseline assessment of pupils' attitudes to school has been conducted for a cohort of Year 6 pupils that can be related to their attainment. Attainment and attitude tests will be repeated at the end of Year 7 to identify other areas for improvement and areas where practice seems to have been successful.
- In devising record keeping procedures in primary schools greater attention was being given to the needs of teachers who will use them in the secondary school.

Ways of working

This group of primary and secondary schools worked together on improvements with their local education authority and a higher education institution. Additionally the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) supported headteachers to develop and pilot the attitude assessment tool. They also advised on research methods and gave direct support with the statistical analysis.

Curriculum continuity between primary and secondary school

This case study aimed to investigate teachers' opinions of measures currently in place to ensure curriculum continuity between primary and secondary school. It considered the various ways in which teachers in one secondary school and its feeder primary schools in the London Borough of Redbridge tried to tackle the problem.

The study asked questions of the primary school staff including the following:

- the information they thought it was important to pass on to their secondary school to maximise curriculum continuity for the children
- how much time they spent on these reports
- how they thought the secondary subject teachers used these reports.

The researchers asked secondary teachers of maths, science, English, history and geography related questions including:

- what information provided by their primary colleagues they found most useful in helping curriculum continuity
- how they used the information they received
- whether they need more or different information.

The findings of the study clearly echo many of the issues highlighted in the main study, including that:

- there are problems with curriculum continuity which are not easily resolved mainly because of the lack of time and the absence of a general strategy
- the documentation prepared by primary colleagues remains largely inaccessible to secondary teachers
- there is evidence of differing school cultures in the two phases.

The study recognised the desire of teachers to make the transfer process work better for the benefit of the pupils. The researchers suggested that action at school and LEA levels were necessary to facilitate this process. In particular, efforts should be made to review and rationalise the type of information being transferred about pupils. The researchers also emphasised the importance of cross-phase schemes of work and other kinds of transfer activity.

Reference: Curriculum continuity between primary and secondary school, N Herrington and L Doyle, Hainult Forest High School, Hainult, Ilford, Essex.

Teacher Research Grant Scheme, 1996-97

The Queen's Beacon School Thinking Skills Project

This study provides evidence of an approach that provided the pace and challenge to pupils of all abilities that the ORACLE project highlights as a problem in post-transfer schools. Whilst this study focused on children in the primary sector the evidence contained in the report and in related Thinking Skills projects in secondary schools supports the use of this approach in the early post-transfer years.

The project aimed to develop effective teaching strategies drawn from recent research into teaching thinking and accelerated learning. The researchers intended that the project should help to create a whole school policy to improve the thinking skills of all pupils.

The strategy incorporated a number of features including:

- thinking logs in which pupils record their questions, ideas and reflections about their learning
- a selection of appropriate texts through which to infuse discussion and higher order thinking into the literacy hour
- metacognitive maths discussion to promote thinking maths in the numeracy hour
- thinking science strategies including pupil questioning, mind -mapping and conceptual thinking in science lessons
- thinking through art to develop visual literacy and creative thinking.

The project was developmental and aimed to provide qualitative evidence to illustrate what worked in practice in the classroom. Evidence was collected by:

- observation of what went on in the classroom
- discussion with pupils and teachers
- analysis of pupils' work.

The research also aimed to help to define a 'thinking curriculum', 'thinking classrooms' and 'thinking schools' in ways which the researchers hoped would facilitate practice in schools. Interim findings suggested that the project has led to a number of gains including improvements in:

- teachers' professional confidence and self-esteem
- pupils' achievement
- children's self-esteem and self-concept as thinkers and learners
- the fluency and quality of children's questioning
- the quality of pupils' thinking
- pupils' ability to listen to others and to participate effectively in class discussion.

The researchers believe that the benefits of the research are not only cognitive. They suggest that the thinking skills approach also helps to develop active citizenship and to create a school community where all members are engaged in supporting each others' thinking and learning.

Reference: The Queen's Beacon School Thinking Skills project, R Fisher, Brunel University, TTA/DfEE Teacher Research Conference, 7 March 2001, Publication number TPU0574/2-01

The teaching of reading in Years 6 and 7

This study shows how some curriculum continuity was maintained between Year 6 and Year 7. The study focused on the teaching of reading in the Year 6 literacy hour and secondary English lessons in Year 7 to discover what sort of strategies were being used in practice and how much continuity there was between the two phases. The authors were aware of the differences in the teaching of English in the two Key Stages and were concerned that some pupils entering secondary school had not got beyond the level of decoding text and that their limited reading ability made it difficult to comprehend text and to represent information.

Evidence was collected using a number of techniques including:

- unstructured interviews with teachers prior to lessons
- classroom observations of two Year 6 literacy hours and two Year 7 English lessons using audio and video recorders
- structured interviews with the teachers following the lessons
- a checklist of pupils' text level reading skills before and after the classroom observations.

Comparisons of the pre- and post- lesson checks of a sample of 25% of the pupils were used to measure the effectiveness of the teaching methods.

In terms of the aims of the two sets of lessons, the researchers found that there was a greater emphasis on the teaching of discrete reading skills in the Year 6 lessons. In contrast, the Year 7 lessons placed greater importance on the interpretation of the text although text level reading skills were also taught during the lessons. Nonetheless, both teachers used similar activities in their lessons including:

- reading text aloud or silently
- comprehension of components of the text eg, role of narrator
- understanding the influence of the writer's choice of syntax on text interpretations
- personal response to and interpretation of the text
- scanning for specific information or language in the text.

The researchers also compared the strategies used by the two teachers and found considerable overlap. Both teachers used a number of strategies that included:

- questioning
- direction
- explanation
- guided exploration
- illustrating.

Whilst there were areas of overlap in the activities and strategies used, the authors were concerned over the lack of continuity in approach to the teaching of reading at text level. This difficulty was clearly recognised at whole-school level and a cross phase initiative planned. The activity involved a project with primary schools, which was organised to run through the summer holiday before transfer, and which aimed to maintain greater curriculum continuity through the transfer period.

Reference: The teaching of reading in Years 6 and 7, D Hewitt and L Mellor, Paget High School, Burton upon Trent, Teacher Training Grant Scheme 1998-99, Publication number 154/8-00

Whole-class interactive teaching in mathematics

This study shows how whole-class teaching can be made more interactive thereby making it more effective and inclusive as a teaching strategy. The lack of interactive whole-class teaching, particularly after transfer is a persistently reported concern from the ORACLE study. The research involved a group of Key Stage 3 maths teachers from a small number of secondary schools who met regularly over a period of time to share good practice. In doing so, they identified key features of effective whole-class teaching. The teachers developed themselves during this collaborative project while improving the motivation, mathematical learning and communication skills of pupils of all abilities.

During the initial part of the research a number of important questions emerged among which were the following:

- What were the structures (including homework) that typified whole-class teaching?
- What teacher actions and strategies could promote learning in mathematics and acquisition of numeracy skills?
- What teacher actions and strategies could promote students' use of imagery?

Data were collected through lesson observation and watching recorded lessons on video. This process allowed the participants to identify a series of key findings that included that whole-class interactive teaching:

- encouraged a culture of working publicly with pupils' beliefs and difficulties

- required an in-depth focus on a small number of significant problems
- focused on key mathematical ideas and misconceptions
- promoted high levels of articulation in pupils of all abilities
- necessitated a significant shift in the teacher's role.

In the practice of whole school, interactive teaching pupils were frequently invited to the front of the class to share solutions to problems with the class. To reassure pupils a distinction was made between the pupils and their mathematics, an approach that produced a positive response from the pupils.

The researchers found that for teaching to be at its most effective pupils needed prolonged engagement with a small number of problems and it was important for teachers to fully explore pupils' misunderstandings, beliefs, feelings and instincts.

The teachers recognised that it was necessary to design problems, which not only allowed pupils access to, but also sometimes impressed awareness of key concepts on pupils. They suggested that problems should tap into pupils' beliefs and at the same time provide a sound link to the mathematics.

The teachers endeavoured to create an environment in which pupils of all abilities were willing to discuss mathematics openly. They found that essential teaching strategies included the use of high level questioning and an insistence on the use of correct mathematical language.

A significant feature of the adopted approach was the necessity for the teacher to be responsive to the needs of the moment rather than to work to a prepared plan. Pupils' contributions were to be valued without always being judged and teachers had to recognise when to encourage discussion and when to intervene.

Reference: Whole-class interactive teaching in mathematics, A Harrington, Cheadle Hume College, Stockport, Teacher Research Grant Scheme 1998-99, Publication number 158/9-00

The impact of school transitions and transfers on pupil progress and attainment

The authors of this report were particularly concerned about pupils' progress at Key Stage 2 and with the 'dip' in attainment and motivation after Key Stage 2. From a review of the literature, the researchers concluded that in the last 20 years much had been achieved including that:

- transfer is better organised from the point of view of teachers, pupils and parents
- fewer pupils experience sustained anxiety about the move to the new school.

The researchers provided a useful overview of what schools were doing to improve transfer. It was based on a survey of schools carried out by the Centre for the Study of Comprehensive Schools at its regional conferences. Responses fell into five main groups:

- managerial
- social and personal
- curriculum continuity
- pedagogy
- pupil management of learning.

Patterns identified in the overview

Managerial approaches included exchanges of information involving individual teachers or organisational approaches which brought pyramids of schools together in working relationships.

Many schools have adopted pupil-centred approaches aimed at helping pupils to cope with the organisational and social realities of the new school. These activities also included taster lessons in subjects such as science and PE, where the facilities in secondary schools are usually much better than in the feeder schools. In some schools, pupils are presented with lessons in subjects such as modern languages about which the pupils may be anxious. Video conferencing has been used for this purpose.

Activities aimed at improving curriculum continuity have taken a number of forms. Often the activity involves exchanges of material and teachers between the schools. Other initiatives have included the setting up of joint activities spanning the final term of the feeder school and the first term of the secondary school. Teachers from both phases have met to discuss the achievement of Year 6 pupils, to work on assessment levels and to observe each other teaching.

A relatively less well-used approach has concerned pedagogy. Some teachers have developed joint programmes in which pupils were taught certain skills such as working collaboratively in groups, or improving their questioning techniques. Some schools have introduced 'super learning days' which offer Year 7 pupils the opportunity to discuss different forms of learning, their strengths and weaknesses as learners and their preferred learning styles.

Some approaches have aimed at giving pupils greater understanding of the structures of learning in their new school. In this approach, activities are designed to help pupils understand the relationship between effort, work produced and their grading. In some schools, parents were involved, and some included counselling sessions for pupils thought to be at risk. As part of this process of preparing students for learning, pupil tracking was used to find out if the pace and challenge of lessons were satisfactory.

Reference: The impact of school transitions and transfers on pupil progress and attainment, M Galton, J Gray and J Ruddock, Homerton College, Cambridge, DfES Research Report no. 131, September 1999

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Further reading

What else might I enjoy reading?

Suffolk LEA. (1997) *A report on an investigation into what happens when pupils transfer into their next school at the ages of 9, 11 and 13*. Ipswich: Inspection and Advice Division, Suffolk Education Department

Schagen, S. and Kerr, D. (1990) *Bridging the gap? The national curriculum and progression from primary to secondary school*. Slough: NFER

Herrington, N. and Doyle, L. (1997). *Curriculum continuity between primary and secondary school*
London: Teacher Training Agency.
www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ntrp/lib/pdf/primarysecondary.pdf

SSCA. (1996) *Promoting continuity between KS2 and KS3*. Middlesex: Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority

Ruddock, J., Chaplain, R. and Wallace, G., (1996) *School improvement: what can pupils tell us?* London: David Fulton.

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Appraisal

Robustness

The researchers revisited a number of schools covered by the Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation (ORACLE) survey of 20 years ago to look at how changes in educational practice since then has affected the process of transition from primary to secondary school. By undertaking this three year longitudinal study the study the authors sought to find if practice had significantly changed, in the new context of the national curriculum, in the schools involved.

Evidence was collected by means of carefully structured observations in the same way as in the original study. Six schools in the East Midlands were included and used as case study sites. Pupil performance was measured both before and after transfer, and pupils' and their parents' attitudes to the transfer process were also assessed. A sample of pupils was observed during their final year of primary school and in the first year after transfer.

Although it is not possible to make universal generalisations from this study, it is sufficiently complex to provide rich data about how schools have tackled the problems of transfer and how successful they have been. Comprising time - elapsed 'fine grained snapshots' of a variety of practices, the study offers some useful insights into the process of transfer in schools.

Relevance

The findings of this study will be of relevance to teachers, parents and policymakers alike, as this difficult time for pupils has long been a cause for concern. The authors argue that the curriculum and changes that occur at transfer have consequences for pupils' academic performance and attitude that are far reaching. This makes the report meaningful to all teachers involved in transfer. The case studies illustrating the main findings are all based in schools with which many teachers will identify and the authors make a point of drawing on examples of good practice.

Applicability

The main purpose of the study was to track the changes in practice implemented by some typical schools to try to improve the transfer process for pupils, teachers and parents. The study concluded that while schools were now much more effective in preparing their pupils for transfer, in terms of social and practical matters, the post transfer dip in attainment and motivation still posed major problems for schools.

The findings of this study are clearly described and illustrate and provide evidence of the efforts made by schools to improve transfer and of what was successful, and what didn't work or needed more attention. Teachers in all schools will find the study helpful for their own institution's development as they seek to tackle the problems of transfer and its aftermath. Staff preparing for transfer will find much to assist them.

Writing

The book is written in an accessible and straightforward style. The findings are clearly presented and have the potential to be relevant to all teachers who deal with pupils affected by transfer. Technical findings contained in the report are mostly in the form of simple percentage or numerical data.

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