

## Supporting primary-secondary transfer through home-school knowledge exchange

The transfer from primary to secondary school can be a difficult time for children and their families. There is often a dip in attainment during the first year of secondary school, and pupils may become more negative in their attitude to school. In this project we helped teachers, pupils and parents find new ways of exchanging knowledge between home, primary school and secondary school. We looked at the impact of this exchange on pupils' attainment, and on their attitude and adjustment to secondary school.

- Parents, children and primary teachers all have significant 'funds of knowledge' which can be drawn on to support transfer, but this knowledge is often ignored by secondary teachers.



They need to find ways of sharing and exchanging their different funds of knowledge through activities such as transfer 'passports', photographs of out-of-school life and videos of secondary school.

- Children at schools which carried out knowledge exchange activities made greater progress in reading from Year 6 to Year 7, were more positive about learning and adjusted more quickly to some aspects of school.



Secondary teachers can address the dip in attainment after transfer by working more closely with children's families and primary teachers. Developing and maintaining an appropriate 'learning identity' may be of crucial importance.

- Children who are particularly 'at risk' when transferring to secondary school - such as boys and children from some minority ethnic groups - can benefit from home-school knowledge exchange.



Schools need to consider how they will provide targeted support for these 'at risk' groups.

# The research

The aim of the Home School Knowledge Exchange project was to work closely with teachers, parents and children to develop, implement and evaluate the impact of home-school knowledge exchange (HSKE) activities. The research had three main strands, and this Briefing focuses on the strand concerned with facilitating transfer from primary to secondary school. Research Briefing 22, available at [http://www.tlrp.org/pub/documents/Hughes\\_RB\\_22\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.tlrp.org/pub/documents/Hughes_RB_22_FINAL.pdf), focuses on the strands concerned with enhancing primary literacy and numeracy through HSKE activities.

The research was carried out in the cities of Bristol and Cardiff. In each strand, four primary schools were involved in the 'action' side of the project, two in Bristol and two in Cardiff. In each city, one primary school had a high proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, a standard indicator of relative affluence, while the other primary school had a low proportion of eligible pupils. The main receiving secondary school for each action primary school was also involved in the research.

A cohort of pupils was followed through Year 6 in the primary schools and Year 7 in the secondary schools. HSKE activities were developed with this set of pupils, their families and their teachers. Some activities took place before transfer in Year 6 while others took place after transfer in Year 7. A key role in developing and implementing these activities was played by an experienced teacher who was seconded to work part-time on the project as a teacher-researcher.

We also worked with a set of comparison schools which were matched with the action schools. Pupils from these schools were assessed on the same instruments as those from the action schools but did not take part in any knowledge exchange activities.

Both cohorts were assessed prior to transfer using a standardised test of attainment in literacy and mathematics, and again after transfer to their new schools, mostly towards the end of the Spring term. Students' dispositions towards learning were also assessed before and after transfer, and their acclimatisation to life in secondary school was assessed by a specially designed questionnaire. A small number of children and their families were also studied in more depth using interviews and observations.

## What we found

### Funds of knowledge to support transfer

There are considerable funds of knowledge in children's homes and communities, which can be drawn on to support school transfer. For example:

- Parents and other family members know a great deal about their children's academic, social and emotional strengths and weaknesses, and how they have responded to change and transition in the past
- Parents and other family members have their own experience of transitions in general, and primary/secondary transfer in particular. Many parents have strong memories - both positive and negative - of their own transfer. Some moved between the same primary and secondary schools as their children
- Some parents have considerable knowledge of the secondary school their child is transferring to, particularly when an older sibling already attends the school. Having a sibling already at the school, with a network of friends or extended family members who might look out for the transferring child, is potentially a very strong resource to support this transfer.
- Teachers in the primary schools which children are transferring from also have extensive knowledge of the children. We found that they were keen to make their knowledge available to the secondary teachers, but that this opportunity was often ignored or dismissed by the secondary teachers. There was a widespread view amongst the secondary teachers that transferring students should have a 'fresh start', and that their new teachers should form their own judgments about them
- The children themselves also had clear expectations about transfer and what it would be like in the secondary school. Key issues for the children were bullying, homework, getting lost, making new friends, and going from being the largest to the smallest pupils in the school. Some of their expectations were accurate, but some were based on hearsay and myth

While there were substantial funds of knowledge to support transfer, there were also many areas where knowledge needed to be shared more widely and effectively between primary school, secondary school and home. We developed a range of knowledge exchange activities for use both before and after transfer.

### Knowledge exchange activities before transfer

- Videos were made about 'life in secondary school' which featured students in Year 7, their parents, teachers and other school staff talking about their experiences in secondary school. For example, one student unpacked her bag to show the things she needed to remember each day. One of the school cooks explained the lunch options and the system of lunch passes for children receiving free school meals. Students also talked of their own anxieties when they started and how these were resolved:

*'I was worried about getting lost but I just asked and people helped'*

The videos were shown to groups of Year 6 children, their parents and teachers. This allowed the children to obtain more accurate knowledge of the secondary school, and to discuss their responses to the video in a group setting

- After watching the video, some Year 6 children made 'Top Tips' booklets. The process of generating the tips required them to identify the skills they might need in secondary school, imagine themselves in their new setting, and offer themselves 'advice' such as:

*'Be yourself – people probably like you better if you act normal'*

*'Ask for help if you need it'*

*'It's good to ask questions in class'*

*'Don't rise to silly comments'*

The important part of the process was the writing of the tips rather than their use. Parents were also invited to contribute a tip for their child's booklet.

- In one primary school, Year 6 parents were invited to an informal evening at the school along with Year 7 parents from the secondary school. Year 6 parents expressed their hopes and concerns about secondary school and shared these in small groups with other Year 6 and Year 7 parents. Through these discussions, parents came to see how they could act as a resource both for their own children and for other parents. As one Year 6 parent said:

*'I thought it was a good opportunity for us to make use of some parents who had already been through the first year and what to expect from the school and our children. The Head of Year was very informative and very open and we were able to ask her questions... in a way I felt quite privileged that we got involved in it'*

### Knowledge exchange activities after transfer

The process of primary/secondary transfer does not stop on the day children start secondary school. Issues and concerns relating to transfer continue throughout Year 7 and beyond. We therefore developed more knowledge exchange activities for use in secondary school.



Figure 1: Pages from a Top Tips Booklet by a Year 6 Pupil



Figure 2: 'Parent and Year 7 pupil looking at a display of out-of-school photographs'

- Children took photographs of their out-of-school lives during the summer holidays and brought them into secondary school at the start of term. The photographs were intended to provide an insight into the children's out-of-school lives for the benefit of their new teachers and of other students. In one school the photographs were used to discuss different kinds of learning, and then turned into a display which parents were invited to visit
- Parents were invited to informal, small-scale parents' meetings early in the autumn term. This enabled them to meet their children's teachers and to find out how the children had settled at a very early stage in their secondary school career
- One secondary school with a large Somali population held an event in the school which celebrated the Somali parents' cooking and other skills. The event was intended to provide recognition of the funds of knowledge in the Somali community and to generate ideas about how they might be used in school. The event was well supported by the headteacher, teachers, students and other parents

### The effects of knowledge exchange activities on attainment and learning disposition

Students who attended a school where knowledge exchange activities had taken place (primary, secondary, or both) made significantly greater progress in literacy from Year 6 to Year 7 compared to students who had not. They also made greater progress in mathematics, but this was not statistically significant. There were no major differences in these effects between boys and girls, between students in Bristol and those in Cardiff, or between schools with high or low proportions of free school meals.

In general, students' attitudes towards their learning became less positive over the period of primary/secondary transfer. This effect was smaller amongst those students who attended primary schools where knowledge exchange activities took place.

Students who attended a primary school where knowledge exchange activities took place adjusted more quickly to some

## Major implications

Some educators and policy-makers suggest that enough is already being done to address the social and emotional difficulties of transfer, and that schools should instead focus on areas such as curriculum continuity between primary and secondary school. But our research suggests that much still needs to be done in the social and emotional areas. Our findings suggest that knowledge exchange activities have a positive effect on students' adjustment to secondary school, which has a significant effect on their attainment. Social, emotional and academic development are closely inter-related.

Children, parents, primary and secondary school teachers each have extensive 'funds of knowledge' which are relevant to primary-secondary transfer. Our research shows that sharing this knowledge can address the dip in attainment which often accompanies transfer, and help children adjust more easily to their new school. Primary-secondary transfer is a long-term process. Planning for transfer needs to start in Year 5 and continue through into Year 8

A student's 'learning identity' may be a key factor here. Transfer to secondary school presents a potential threat to a learning identity established in primary school, as well as providing an opportunity to develop a new identity. Our case studies suggest that home-school knowledge exchange can help support students through this difficult period and enable them to develop or maintain an identity conducive to learning in the new school.

Teacher time invested in knowledge exchange activities at transfer may have both short term and long-term benefits. As one teacher said:

*'More than happy to help out in that sort of.. anything like that... because in the long run those sort of things make your job easier, if you know who the parents are and they know who you are, if you do need to contact parents you're not just a name then, they know who you are. And normally the children are more likely to approach you as well because of that'*

### Supporting 'at risk' children and families at transfer

Research has shown that some groups – such as boys and children from African-Caribbean heritage – are more vulnerable at transfer than others. Our research suggests that children from these groups can benefit just as much from home-school knowledge exchange activities as children from other groups. However, schools need to make sure they and their families are not excluded or marginalised by these activities.

In some cases, schools need to develop strategies for involving groups or families

aspects of secondary school. They scored more positively on the question 'before you started did you know what to expect?' and on questions concerned with how quickly they found their way around and how quickly they got used

to other students. Surprisingly, these students also reported getting a detention or punishment more quickly than the comparison students.

considered to be at risk or hard to reach. In a follow-up project funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation we worked with a primary and secondary school located in a deprived, mainly white area.

Specific strategies were developed for engaging with ten target families who were identified as being particularly disengaged from school. These strategies included personalised invitations, home visits, regular phone calls and efforts to build an individual relationship with each family. These target families became much more involved in the activities than had been predicted at the start of the project. Their children settled much better than expected in secondary school.

### Using drama to support primary-secondary transfer

In another follow-on project, funded by TLRP, we looked at the role which drama can play in supporting children and their families at primary/secondary transfer. We worked with the Cardiff-based theatre company Theatr Iolo to run three drama workshops for children in their last few weeks at primary school. The children attended two contrasting schools in Bristol and Cardiff, and parents were invited to attend and participate in the final workshop. The drama activities included:

- developing a 'drama within a drama' about two children, a brother and sister, who were about to experience transfer
- 'Ridiculous rumours', in which children were encouraged to invent far-fetched rumours about secondary school and discuss their nature
- making a 'frozen shape' of feelings about leaving primary school
- acting out different kinds of body language in the playground, with an emphasis on ways of behaving which would help make new friends .
- going on a virtual tour of secondary school with students who already attend it
- listening to parents talking about their hopes and fears about transfer

Follow-up workshops were carried out in the secondary schools. All the workshops were seen as valuable by the children, their teachers and parents. The activities enabled the children to express their fears and concerns about secondary school in a non-threatening and supportive environment. A DVD entitled 'Ready or Not?' is available which shows the workshops in action (see Further Information).

# Further information

## Papers and journal articles

A full account of the effects of HSKE activities can be found in:

- Greenhough, P., Hughes, M., Andrews, J., Goldstein, H., McNess, E., Osborn, M., Pollard, A., Stinchcombe, V., and Yee, W.C. (2007), What effect does involving parents in knowledge exchange activities during transfer from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 have on children's attainment and learning dispositions? *Paper presented at the BERA conference, London, September.* Available at <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/169930.doc>

A detailed account of the transfer experiences of two case study children from the project can be found in:

- Osborn, M., McNess, E. and Pollard, A. (2006) Identity and transfer: a new focus for home-school knowledge exchange, *Educational Review*, volume 58, no 4 (November).

This article is part of a special issue of *Educational Review* devoted to home-school knowledge exchange and containing six articles on aspects of the project's work

## DVD

An interactive DVD made by Focus Productions and entitled 'Ready or Not?' shows examples of the drama activities used to support pupils and parents through transfer. The DVD shows the activities being used in practice and features interviews with pupils, teachers, parents and members of Theatr lolo. The DVD also contains a play-in-rehearsal entitled 'Ready or Not?' based on case studies from the project and performed by Theatr lolo. The DVD is available at £4.99 from [wan.yee@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:wan.yee@bristol.ac.uk).

## Reports

The final reports of the Home School Knowledge Exchange project and the follow-up Drama project can be found at <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/index.aspx> (search 'awards and outputs' for 'Home school knowledge exchange and transformation' and 'Using drama to increase the impact of the home school knowledge exchange project')

### Project website:

<http://www.tlrp.org/proj/phase11/phase2e.html>

### Project contact:

Professor Martin Hughes  
Graduate School of Education,  
University of Bristol, 35 Berkeley Square, Bristol BS8 1JA  
Tel: 0117-928-7007  
Email: [Martin.Hughes@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:Martin.Hughes@bristol.ac.uk)

### Project team:

Martin Hughes (project director), Jane Andrews, Anthony Feiler, Pamela Greenhough, David Johnson, Elizabeth McNess, Marilyn Osborn, Andrew Pollard, Mary Scanlan, Leida Salway, Vicki Stinchcombe, Jan Winter, Wan Ching Yee. John Bastiani, Guy Claxton, and Harvey Goldstein acted as project consultants.

June 2008

# The warrant

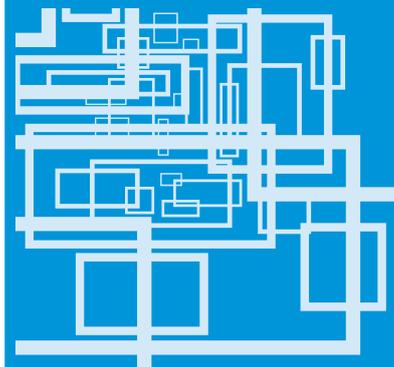
The project used two main methodological approaches – quantitative and qualitative – as the basis for any claims arising from it.

Quantitative data were collected on pupils' attainment, using the PIPS test developed at Durham University, and their learning disposition, using the ELLI test developed at the University of Bristol. These data were collected from the whole cohort of children in both the action and comparison schools, a total of around 270 children. The data were analysed using multi-level modeling software (MLwiN) under the supervision of the project consultant Harvey Goldstein. Models were constructed of the relationship between attainment scores over time with other factors such as action/comparison, city, free school meals and gender. Non-parametric approaches (Mann Whitney and Wilcoxon tests) were also used in data analysis.

More qualitative investigations were carried out with six target families from each class. These involved interviews with parents, teachers and children, and observations of children in school both before and after transfer. This work was extended through case studies selected from amongst the targets. These qualitative data were analysed using frameworks developed in previous work by Martin Hughes, Pamela Greenhough and Andrew Pollard.

The project's advisory group consisted of academics, policy-makers and practitioners with considerable experience in the home-school area. This group was used as a sounding board for findings as they arose from the project. Individual project publications and the end of award report also received rigorous examination from other academics working in the field.

# Teaching and Learning Research Programme



TLRP involves some 90 research teams with contributions from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Work began in 2000 and the Technology Enhanced Learning phase will continue to 2012.

**Learning:** TLRP's overarching aim is to improve outcomes for learners of all ages in teaching and learning contexts across the UK.

**Outcomes:** TLRP studies a broad range of learning outcomes, including the acquisition of skill, understanding, knowledge and qualifications and the development of attitudes, values and identities relevant to a learning society.

**Lifecourse:** TLRP supports projects and related activities at many ages and stages in education, training and lifelong learning.

**Enrichment:** TLRP commits to user engagement at all stages of research. It promotes research across disciplines, methodologies and sectors, and supports national and international co-operation.

**Expertise:** TLRP works to enhance capacity for all forms of research on teaching and learning, and for research informed policy and practice.

**Improvement:** TLRP develops the knowledge base on teaching and learning and policy and practice in the UK.

### TLRP Directors' Team

Professor Andrew Pollard | London  
Professor Richard Noss | London  
Professor Miriam David | London  
Professor Alan Brown | Warwick  
Professor Mary James | London

### TLRP Programme Office

Sarah Douglas | [sarah.douglas@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.douglas@ioe.ac.uk)  
James O'Toole | [j.o'toole@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:j.o'toole@ioe.ac.uk)  
[tlrp@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:tlrp@ioe.ac.uk)

### TLRP

Institute of Education  
University of London  
20 Bedford Way  
London WC1H 0AL  
UK

Tel +44 (0)20 7911 5577

