

## School Transfer

The transfer from primary to secondary school is a rite of passage in the UK education system. Over the last forty years researchers have highlighted the challenges faced by children as they transfer schools. Increasingly, studies have focused on the children's experience of the 'informal' cultures of schools, e.g. friendships, as well as the 'formal' cultures, e.g. curriculum, teaching and learning, etc. Yet despite the attention focussed on this critical transfer in children's formal schooling, Galton and Hargreaves (2002) point out, according to their follow up to the earlier ORACLE study (Galton and Willcocks, 1983; Delamont and Galton, 1986)

...there has been little change in the delivery of the curriculum in these transfer schools over the two decades [which] now means that there is little that is unfamiliar to pupils when they move schools. This...appears to be accompanied by less enjoyment of school, less enthusiasm for the teachers and their methods, and a drop in motivation. As a result, there still exists a hiatus in some pupil's progress, albeit on a smaller scale than two decades ago. (p 187)

This hiatus was reported in a DfES funded study (Galton, Gray et al., 1999), wherein the authors recognized the need for further research from subject perspectives. Many of the books on the school transfer (Nicholls and Gardner, 1999; Hargreaves and Galton, 2002) don't have anything useful to say to mathematics teachers about how to improve this state of affairs. One alarming statistic from the latter book is that mathematics is top of the list of things least looked forward to by children, to in the run up to transfer, apart from for high attaining boys (Galton, Comber et al., 2002). So a more important question here is about which children encounter difficulties in the move. Nisbet and Entwistle (1969) found that children from lower SES backgrounds were relatively disadvantaged in the move and studies show that this is still the case. Noyes (2003a) has explored one of the reasons why this might be and how mathematics teachers unwittingly contribute to the relative success of some children at the move Noyes (2003b).

The Government pledged to sort out the problem (DfEE, 2001a) and part of their strategy for achieving this was the Numeracy and Key Stage 3 Strategies. These have had some impact upon schools but they are not the magic wand for solving school transfer that the policymakers had hoped (see Noyes, 2004, for a theoretical view on this). The accompanying bridging units have not had much effect on pedagogy beyond their period of use (Galton and Morrison, 2000, p. 447).

Whilst schools work hard to develop data transfer, curriculum continuity and liaison processes, it is arguably... more important to explore whether the structural limitations inherent in our school system are preventing further progress, rather than merely seeking to place all the blame on teachers for the present hiatus. (Galton and Hargreaves, 2002, p. 189)

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