

Innovative Pathways from Secondary School: Gaining a Sense of Direction

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Introduction

The transitions from school young people are experiencing today are increasingly becoming less predictable and more complex than the school-to-work transitions of the past (Wyn & Dwyer, 1999; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). In the past a “career for life” was the backbone of people’s working life. Now young people have no such backbone, and they are entering a world in which there is a lesser demand for unskilled workers; increased access to higher education and rapid growth in the range of tertiary study options, institutions, and qualifications; and in which there is increasing individualism in lifestyles.

In this world there is a lot of choice, and young people need to be flexible and versatile as they manage their careers. They need to be prepared to have more than one career, and have the skills needed to participate in the knowledge economy. How can school teachers and careers educators support students in making informed decisions about their future study and career options as they enter this environment?

To provide some answers to this question, we are conducting a longitudinal study, *Innovative Pathways from School*, which examines the influence, on student career decision-making, of the transition support (that is, information, advice, guidance, and career development activities) provided to students at seven low decile schools through their non-conventional programmes of study. This study also examines how the partnerships made between schools and tertiary providers and employers influence students’ transition decision-making, and assist them in their transition from school.

Focus of the study

The National Administration Guidelines now require schools to specifically target students who are “at risk” of leaving school “unprepared for the transition to the workplace or further education/training” (NAG 1.vi, Ministry of Education, 2000). To provide information on the programmes schools are developing to assist these students, we targeted low decile schools for this study and focussed on the programmes which the schools considered best supported “at risk” students in their transition decision-making.

The *Innovative Pathways* study aims to provide information on the following questions:

1. What are the features of effective programmes?
2. Does the programme assist the retention of students at school?
3. Does participation in the programme assist students’ transition to further study or work? How does this occur?

Nature of the research

The *Innovative Pathways* study is a three-phase research project. In phase 1, at the start of 2002, we visited seven schools to collect information on the non-conventional programmes each school identified as assisting students in their transition to employment or tertiary education. We interviewed the school staff and a sample of the external providers (of course content, training, or work placements) who designed or delivered the programmes about the development and content of the programmes, the transition support they provided, and the partnerships they made. We also interviewed about 17 students at each school about their past educational experiences, current sources of transition information, and current transition plans. In addition, we collected information on students’ prior qualifications and attendance rates and we interviewed some of their parents. The findings from this phase of this study are written up in Boyd et al. (2002).

At the end of 2002, in phase 2, we returned to the schools to interview the school staff about the transition support they provided during 2002, and the outcomes for students. We interviewed 74 of the 75 students who were still at school and asked them about their experiences of the programmes, their attitudes towards school, the assistance provided to them in developing their transition plans, and their current and future work and study plans. We also interviewed 23 of the 44 students who had left school about their: experiences of the programmes, reasons for leaving school, and activities since leaving school.

We plan to follow up students at the start of 2004 in order to ascertain the longer-term impact of the programmes on their post-school destinations and experiences.

Background of the students

This paper discusses some of the findings from the first two phases of this study and uses the information collected from the 97 students we interviewed at the end of 2002. These students were all in Year 12 to 14, approximately half (52 percent) were male and half (48 percent) were female. The largest group identified as Māori (34 percent) and the next largest as Pasifika (32 percent). Of the others 24 percent identified as Pākehā, 3 percent as Asian, and 7 percent as of more than one ethnicity.

The students in our study typically had no or low qualifications before they entered these programmes. Most students had gained none, or at the most one or two, School Certificate subjects. Some had also received low grades in some Sixth Form Certificate subjects.

The seven schools and their programmes

The programmes in this study stand alongside “mainstream” Bursary programmes and were designed for students who were not succeeding in the mainstream. The courses in these programmes were mostly vocational in nature and were developed in areas related to student interests and local employment or training opportunities, for example, outdoor education, hospitality, engineering, or tourism. Some of the programmes were two years in length and others one, but most students in this study stayed for one year only.

All of the programmes we looked at involved students staying together as class groups for longer periods of time than in standard school subjects, and most were full-time. These programmes all had core classes which students attended along with their selected main subject or subjects. The core classes varied between programmes but typically included communications, numeracy, independent living skills, employment skills, and computing. Teachers attempted to integrate the content of the core classes with the main subject areas. Although the emphasis of each programme varied, they all had a focus on:

- hands-on or experiential learning;
- providing students with unit standards and/or the National Certificate in Employment Skills or other National Certificates (and in some cases, other qualifications);
- providing connections to tertiary study options;
- providing work experience opportunities; and
- assisting students to develop personally and to develop work-readiness skills, attitudes, and behaviours.

The programmes and the schools included in this study are the:

- Advanced Studies Academies at Linwood College, Christchurch;
- Academy Programme at Aranui High School, Christchurch;
- Institute of Studies at Western Heights High School, Rotorua;
- World of Work and Sir Edmund Hillary and Outdoor Education and Tourism Studies Programmes at Tongariro High School, Turangi;
- Gateway Programme at Auckland Girls' Grammar School;
- Tertiary Pathways Programme at Aorere College, Auckland; and
- Senior Integrated Programme at James Cook High School, Auckland.

Did the students think they were prepared for life outside school?

At the start and end of 2002, we asked the students whether they thought school had prepared them for life outside school. At the start of 2002, as shown in table 1, less than half of the students (41 percent) considered that school had prepared them either “very well” or “quite well”. By the end of 2002, the views of students who were still at school showed a significant positive shift, and this figure had almost doubled (78 percent).

Table 1
Students' Views on Whether School Had Prepared Them for Life Outside School at the Start and End of 2002

	Very well prepared %	Quite well prepared %	Well prepared %	Not very well prepared %	Not at all well prepared %	Not sure %
Start 2002 (N = 97)	15	26	29	23	5	-
End 2002 (still at school, N = 74)	35	43	16	5	-	-
End 2002 (left school, N = 23)	17	17	26	22	13	4

What experiences did these students have which assisted them to feel prepared? The two most often cited reasons students gave for feeling prepared was the work experience and/or qualifications and course passes they had gained during 2002. Students also mentioned a number of other things they had gained from their courses which had assisted them to feel prepared, that is, they had:

- received advice or information which had assisted them to develop their career goals or consider their options;
- engaged in a range of learning experiences which had assisted them to develop their career goals or consider their options;
- received information about tertiary courses;
- received practical transition assistance, for example, help to develop a CV, complete an application form, or practice job interview skills;
- developed personally, for example, in self-confidence or in social or communication skills;
- developed practical job skills, for example, customer service skills; and
- developed life skills, such as, budgeting.

Guiding and informing: who provided the students with transition advice and information?

We asked these young people about their sources of transition support in 2002. Most students had access to a wide range of information sources which were both people-based and print-based. The students who were still at school reported using a wider range of sources than the students who had left school.

People were an important source of transition support for just about all of the students who were still at school and the majority of those who had left. The groups of people who provided these students with information, advice, or help about jobs or courses they could do when they left school were:

School staff

- Course teachers (73 percent – two course teachers were also school careers educators);
- School careers or transition educators (43 percent);
- Deans, tutor teachers, or other teachers at school (11 percent);

Tertiary providers

- Talks by polytechnic or university visitors (54 percent);
- Tertiary providers who taught courses the student attended (19 percent);

Work placement providers and people in the workforce

- Careers talks by visiting employers, the army, etc. (55 percent);
- People who students met on work experience or during visits to workplaces (35 percent);

Family and friends

- Family or family friends (55 percent); and
- Friends or other students (35 percent).

The types of support each group of people provided varied. In this paper we will examine the nature of the connections made with these four key groups of people, and the different types of transition support members of each group provided.

Keeping it in the family: transition support provided by family and friends

The types of transition advice and information provided by family members

The influence of young people's families on their transition decision-making has been mentioned in many studies (Ball et al., 2000; Boyd et al., 2001). In a longitudinal study of London youth, Ball et al. (2000) discussed how family members tended to give the young people in their study "interpret the world" advice, or advice which usually came from within the family's "frames of reference" or experience. In this current study this was also the case. The "interpret the world" advice family members gave students focussed on areas such as working or studying hard.

Student: *They gave me heaps of advice. Stuff like go hard at school, stick at stuff, don't keep changing your mind, know what you want to do.*

Family members also gave these young people information about situations from within their "frames of reference", that is, their own jobs or study.

Student: *Mum gave me information on working at Auckland hospital and what it's like and working in a health office and things they do in the office. Dad told me about being a cop.*

One feature of the support provided by some family members was that they tended to "tell" their child what job they should do, or which pathway they should take. This might or might not have been of interest to their child.

Student: *My mum told me to go work with my dad. He does meat processing stuff. It's a lot of money, but I want to do something I enjoy!*

A smaller number of family members found information about new options or discussed the range of options open to their child.

Student: *My mum went round looking at pamphlets and stuff and rang up Waiariki [Institute of Technology] and asked for lots of information.*

Student: *My mum has helped me fill out my application form, has supported me, helped me with my school work, and talked through my options.*

Other family members provided encouragement to their child as they examined their options.

Parent: *Just encouragement. But she did all the background work, for example, going on the Internet and phoning.*

Approximately half of the students did not report receiving transition support from family members. One of the reasons family members did not provide support was that they were not sure of the options available to their child.

Student: *They [parents] didn't really know what was going on, but the teachers did.*

Overall, the types of transition support provided by family members was general in nature and were mostly drawn from family members' experiences. Family support was especially important for students who left school part way through the year.

The types of transition advice and information provided by friends

Students' friends also tended to advise students from their personal "frames of reference", that is, they encouraged them to do similar activities to themselves. Friends also supported students in their interests, or tried to find their friends part-time jobs at their places of work.

Student: *My best friend says I should work full-time next year, and study with her the year after that.*

Student: *They are encouraging me to do tattooing and get off my arse. My mate in the army wants me to join up.*

Keeping it real: transition support provided through partnerships with employers

The nature of the work placements

Work experience and workplace learning are widely recognised as vehicles through which students can gain experience of the workplace, try out different career options, learn practical skills, refine their career ideas, and develop wider career aspirations (Fullarton, 1999; Tertiary Education Commission, 2003; University of Melbourne, 2001).

Most of the students in this study attended work placements. Schools' approaches to arranging these placements differed according to the nature and purpose of the programmes. The placements were usually for one week or more. At some schools work placements were organised as solid blocks of time, while at others, for one or two days a week over a longer period. At most schools students attended more than one placement. The students were given choice in the placements they attended, and teachers endeavoured to match placements to students' needs and interests. The range of locations students attended varied and included among other things, a radio station, a publishing company, ski fields, gyms, and engineering firms.

The programmes that did not include more than a day or two of work experience provided knowledge about the world of work to students through onsite work experience. For example, the students studying sports-orientated courses at Aranui High School were given the opportunity to coach students at a local primary school, and students in the hospitality and catering course at Aorere College had opportunities to cater for visiting school guests and school functions. Students perceived these on-site work experiences to be giving them "real-life" work skills and experience.

The teachers took a flexible attitude to the placement of students and were willing to re-arrange placements if they were not working out, or meeting students' needs. Teachers also described the importance of taking a flexible approach to students who wanted to leave school for permanent jobs. A number of teachers described the way in which they kept the door open for students who left school for jobs, so that if those jobs did not work out they could come back into the school programme.

Other information about the workforce

The preparation students received at school for their work placements, and the core modules they studied, also contributed to students' understanding of the world of work. For example students at Auckland Girls' Grammar School attended a service sector class which covered information about workplace requirements and opportunities. Students were able to practice some of the skills they would be using before they attended their work placements, and were provided with other information about the workforce, such as employee rights and responsibilities. Students also gained information about the workplace from information sources such as pamphlets and websites. Visits to Careers Expos, and visits to and from employers, also provided students with employer contacts.

What students gained from work placements

The teachers considered that giving students work experiences while still at school was important because it allowed them to change their mind or make mistakes in a low stakes environment without incurring either financial or personal costs. This option is not so readily available to students once they leave school, and was an important facet of the transition experiences of these students who mostly came from low-income families.

***Teacher:** If they say, "I don't want to work in a library," I say, "Well done." It's still valid. It [choosing a career path] is a process of elimination.*

Attending work placements was the most commonly mentioned reason students gave for feeling prepared for life outside school. These students highly valued their work placements, which had "staircased" some into apprenticeships or employment, and assisted others to clarify their career and study goals.

The students valued getting out of school and experiencing the "real world", trying out the theory they had learnt at school, and the greater understanding of job requirements they gained as a result of attending work placements. The outcomes students typically reported gaining from their attendance at work placements were:

- personal development, for example, self-confidence, and social or communication skills;
- practical job skills and customer service skills;
- unit standard credits;
- information and advice about particular jobs;
- information and advice about tertiary courses;
- increased understanding of the requirements of different jobs and working conditions;
- experience of a range of different career options; and
- offers of part- or full-time jobs, holiday jobs, or apprenticeships.

***Student:** Work experience pushed me in the right direction with tertiary study and made me decide definitely what I wanted to do.... Before I didn't really have a realistic view of what life was like outside school but through work experience now I do...*

***Student:** I got a lot out of work experience at Air New Zealand. It helped me to learn about what the tourism industry is about and what roles different people play in different industries in tourism.*

***Student:** The work experience helped me to get an idea of what job I want. We moved around – so you get an idea. At the end of the day you can make up your mind if you want to be an engineer.*

The types of transition advice and information provided by employers

At work placements students not only tried out their career ideas, but also received information and advice about jobs and options for tertiary study. The work placement providers students met gave them information from within the “frames of reference” of their own work experiences, which tended to be information about their job, or about the courses the students could do to get a similar job.

Student: *They just told me what [tertiary courses] they had done, like what I'm going to do....*

Student: *They gave us an insight into the job. They talked to us on a 1 on 1 basis. They gave us the real lifestyle behind it, not just what the pamphlets say.*

Student: *They were telling me about the sorts of things they do at their work and the sorts of things [benefits and training] they offer staff.*

In some cases employers offered students jobs or actively assisted students to find jobs or courses, for example, by ringing up tertiary institutions for course information.

Student: *They asked about my plans for next year. They offered me an apprenticeship. They say I'm good at welding.*

Student: *At the pharmacy they told me if you want to do this job then I need to get this degree: Level 1. They helped me with information and rang up for me to ask about the course to do the job.*

Visiting speakers also provided students with information.

Student: *We have people coming in to talk to us about the particular services and we are given a lot of pamphlets etc. The visiting speakers advise us about qualifications we need.*

Managing work placements

Most of the teachers were very clear about the value of work experience for students, but finding relevant placements, and managing students at placements, were on-going challenges for schools, and required considerable skill and time. The importance of this managing and monitoring role is acknowledged in the evaluation of Gateway which identified the role of the work placement co-ordinator as one of the pivotal elements of the programme (Tertiary Education Commission, 2003). The challenges of managing the work placements for the teachers were:

- Monitoring students' attendance at work placements and maintaining relationships with employers if students did not attend placements, decided they were not interested in a placement, or if students and employers did not get on well with each other;
- Finding “real” placements which matched students' interests, and in which they were doing more than simple tasks such as photocopying;
- Ensuring that placements were culturally safe in that employers understood the cultures and behaviours of students,
- Preparing students (especially those from Pasifika backgrounds) so that they felt confident enough to attend their placements;
- Managing workplace assessments and finding assessors;
- Managing employers who wanted to recruit students;
- Ensuring students had the right clothing and understood professional behaviour; and
- Students not wanting to work non-school hours.

Raising aspirations: transition support provided through partnerships with tertiary educators

In all the programmes attempts were made to “staircase” students towards further study. The results of this staircasing were evident for a number of students who, during 2002, developed or confirmed their aspirations to do tertiary study. Students were introduced to the idea of tertiary study and/or given direct experience of the tertiary environment, in an attempt to demystify the idea of further study and increase students’ confidence in their ability to succeed. This was done in a variety of ways which are outlined below.

Tertiary taster or block courses

Most of the programmes received STAR funding which enabled students to attend either on or off-site tertiary block courses. These courses gave students an idea of what the tertiary environment was like, and information about other tertiary courses. Some of the students who left school during 2002 continued to study with these tertiary providers. Students who attended off-site tertiary courses perceived the practical components of these courses, such as working in an industrial kitchen at a polytechnic, as “real-life” work experience.

***Student:** Doing a couple of courses made me change my mind [about my plans]. I liked those courses more.*

***Student:** I learnt stuff about landscaping and farm skills. I learnt about serving people and how to set up tables. I learnt what the forest managers do when they go out and check trees and do planting and stuff.*

“Foundation” courses

Some programmes were set up as “foundation courses” in which students studied units provided in conjunction with a local tertiary provider, for example, students at Aorere College were able to gain MIT Short Course Certificates at school.

***Tertiary provider:** Students get a taste of the philosophy of our tertiary programme, and get exposed to some of the teaching materials, so the bridge from secondary to tertiary is not so difficult to cross.*

Other courses provided students with credits towards modern apprenticeships, for example, the Engineering (pre-apprenticeship) programme at Linwood College. At the schools which offered these foundation courses, moves were being made by the schools and local tertiary institutions to align their curricula to enable better transfer of credits and more direct pathways to further study.

Qualifications as a stepping stone

Other schools placed an emphasis on qualifications as a way of staircasing students towards further study. For example, at Auckland Girls’ Grammar School, students who were studying for Level 1 National Certificates were provided with information which showed how they could continue to do a Level 2 or 3 Certificate in the same area at a tertiary institution.

Two-way visits between tertiary institutions and schools

Another way teachers and careers and transition educators attempted to demystify the tertiary environment was by arranging visits to and from tertiary institutions. Many schools in the study took these linkages between institutions a step further than the general visits most secondary school students experience. This was achieved by targeting the specific departments students were interested in attending, and by arranging more than one visit so that real relationships could be established, and students could overcome their lack of confidence.

Teacher: *Many of these kids are tough and macho in a group but actually lack the confidence to move out of their locality or comfort zone and do things like catch the bus to go to a polytechnic to do a course.*

At some schools organised visits between students and the organisers of Māori and Pasifika tertiary scholarships. Other schools arranged for ex-students to visit to talk about their tertiary experiences. Other ways students were connected with the tertiary environment included:

- Attending university, polytechnic, and PTE open days;
- Being provided with information about tertiary providers from Careers Expos;
- Researching tertiary options to develop a career plan using resources such as the KiwiCareers website, tertiary institution websites, and handbooks.

The types of transition advice or information provided by tertiary educators

The types of information or advice tertiary providers gave students centred around the tertiary courses in their areas and the jobs related to these courses.

Student: *All of them [instructors] gave us advice. They were like our mates and they told us about what they do, and how they got there, and what it takes.*

Student: *[The building instructor] said I should become a builder, or do a course, or get an apprenticeship. He told me about his full-time courses.*

The challenges of linking with tertiary providers

The teachers experienced a number of challenges in managing the relationships with tertiary providers, such as:

- Tertiary providers who wanted to recruit students rather than encourage them to explore their options;
- Students having to repeat unit standards they had already completed while at school;
- Finding providers who offered courses with suitable content, and at a cost and time that suited the school;
- Ensuring that providers structured their courses to an appropriate level for younger students; and
- Monitoring attendance at off-site tertiary courses.

Career brokers: transition support provided by school staff

The types of transition advice and information provided by course teachers

There were noticeable difference in the types of transition support given to students by the course teachers and the careers educators in this study. Course teachers were the people in this study who students most frequently mentioned as providing them with transition support. This support was a mix of information, advice, and guidance, and was often tailored to each student's interests.

The course teachers were the main group of people who broadened students' horizons beyond their family's frames of reference and were the people who students most frequently reported discussing and exploring their options with. Similar to the findings of other studies, this shows the important role that school staff at low decile schools can play in providing students with career information and advice (Boyd et al., 2001).

Student: *My Engineering teacher gave me the idea of going to MIT and furthering my studies.*

Course teachers were students' main sources of information about specific jobs, and one of students' main sources of information about tertiary courses. Course teachers acted as career

brokers by outlining the tertiary courses available to students, assisting students to collect information on courses they were interested in, and by recommending people for students to talk to.

Student: *[He gave me] heaps...the courses that Tertiary Pathways could line you into... different courses and apprenticeships. He brought in past students to talk about the options they are taking, and employers, and we visited MIT.*

Student: *He gave me advice for people to ring, he set up interviews for me.*

Teachers tended to filter the plethora of options available to students and direct students to pathways which had previously “worked” both academically and financially for past students.

Student: *Mainly it's my teacher – she has really helped me and guided me...She pushed me to succeed. She mostly just gave me encouragement and told me what past students had done and gave me options, she wasn't telling me what to do, she just guided me.*

Course teachers also actively supported students in their transition from school in a number of other ways, for example, by working to develop students' self-confidence, assisting students to develop their CVs and complete enrolment forms, or by attending job interviews as support people.

It was clear that students valued the transition support provided by their teachers, which was an extension of the personal attention teachers paid them. The direct-action approach taken by some of the teachers in this study, who found students jobs and apprenticeships, seemed to work well for a number of students.

The types of transition advice and information provided by careers educators

The types of transition support provided by careers educators was mostly based around providing information and giving practical assistance, rather than discussing and exploring each individual's options. Like course teachers, careers educators were one of students' main sources of information about tertiary courses and acted as career brokers by connecting students with people or sources of information related to their particular pathway.

Student: *[The careers advisor gave me] brochures that told you about new stuff that was going on; like job experience, courses, apprenticeships, jobs...*

Careers educators were the main group of people who assisted students with enrolment, job applications, and scholarship forms, and were the main people within the school who provided career and transition information to the students who left school during the 2002 year.

Student: *I went to the careers advisor and she helped me fill out my application form. She told me how to do it exactly right.*

How did teachers and careers educators provide this support?

Group transition support

One key component of the transition support provided to students was the whole class activities they engaged in. Whole class support was provided by both course teachers and careers educators. At some schools, the careers services had developed a package of transition support especially for the programmes in this study which tended to be provided to class groups. These types of whole class activities included: completion of student career interest surveys; career information talks; visits to Careers Expos, polytechnics, universities, Private Training Enterprises, and employers; and employer and recruiter visits to school. In some cases the school careers services organised work placements, in others cases this was done by the course teachers, or by a co-ordinator.

The course teachers and careers educators we talked to considered the provision of transition support to a whole class group to be particularly effective as students could be taken on whole class visits without missing out on other classes. Careers educators also considered providing a “package” for a whole group of students as an effective use of their time, and enabled them to specifically tailor their content to the interests of the group.

Individual transition support and action in relation to individual’s career plans

The course teachers considered that the key to the transition support they provided was the individual discussions they had with each student. Teachers considered the essential elements of this support to be the way in which it was provided in the context of a trusting relationship, and was on-going, informal, and focussed on each student and their different career and study plans.

The provision of transition support started at the beginning of the year when teachers or careers educators surveyed students about their interests, required students to develop career plans, and/or initiated informal talks about students’ future plans. These initial activities enabled students to explore their options and consider their interests and strengths. Course teachers continued having informal discussions with students throughout the year.

***Teacher:** When they ask me about a job, or when I become aware that they’re interested in a job, I talk over as much as I can with them about what that job might require, what sort of things they need to do. If I feel that there’s more involved than what I can tell them, I refer them to the transition people. Certainly, I do involve myself. In fact I’m disappointed if I ever hear of a child leaving school to do nothing. I tell them constantly, “I can accept you going to a course, I can accept you going to work, I cannot accept you staying home and playing Playstation or something like that.” So, I talk about what they should be doing or could be doing, and I do my best sometimes to find out the requirements of the job or course that they’re aiming at.*

Good relationships as a pre-requisite to providing individual transition support

The forging of good relationships between students and teachers, between students and their peers, and with employers or people in tertiary institutions, was a high priority in the programmes. Teachers perceived good student-teacher relationships to be a conduit for the transition support they provided to students.

Students and teachers identified a number of elements to student-teacher relationships which they considered supported students both in their learning and in their transition decision-making. On the whole these elements were common across schools but were emphasised more or less depending on the personalities of the teachers, the nature of the subject area, and the ethnicity of the students and teachers. A number of teachers commented on how the behaviour and approaches they used with the students in the programmes in this study differed from the approaches they used with mainstream classes.

The development of these relationships was supported by the length of time students spent with each other and with their course teachers. The characteristics and practices which teachers and students commonly mentioned are described below.

“Whānau” members

Teachers had a view of student-teacher relationships that went well beyond the boundaries of the school gate. Teachers talked about their personal situations so students had a picture of them in the context of their life and family. In this way the teachers became whānau members.

***Teacher:** They [these students] need to see you as a person, not just as their teacher. They want to know about you. I am totally different with my NCEA class. They [the NCEA class] know very little about me, other than where I have taught, that sort of thing.*

Being a whānau member also included putting additional personal time into the job and acting as a support person, for example, by accompanying students to job interviews.

Teacher: *A girl... she couldn't get into town for an interview. But I went in as her support person and that means a huge thing to kids. I did it last year with two of our kids. It also shows the interviewer that the teachers are behind the students...*

Teachers were knowledgeable about students' home situations and how these might impact on students' learning. At some schools, teachers had a lot of contact with students' families.

Role models

Most of the teachers talked about how they acted as role models for students and as de facto parents.

Teacher: *When I look back, there are times when they asked me a question and I would run the whole hour talking values, morals, things like that. I found that a lot of these kids are looking for that. They are looking for direction. ...I'm more of a father figure to a lot of them. They would come here and discuss their problems at home to me. They know I've got two teenage kids...*

Many of the teachers were from Māori or non-Pākehā backgrounds which they considered assisted them to relate to Māori and Pasifika students, and become role models for them.

Teacher: *...they suddenly get a teacher that's similar to them, similar background. A teacher who is like their mum and dad, who dropped out of school, had a family real young, and then took a look and went back to school. If he can do it, we can do it...*

In my first lesson I talked to them about that, where I've come from, in the gangs and all that sort of stuff... So I tell them that story. [I say] "Look at other avenues. Sport is a vehicle is to get out of the mill..." So I give them that. "You have that opportunity. Don't be like me and wait till you're 34. You're 16, 17, do it now..."

...I'm trying to make them see the big picture. I think they don't see the picture. I think they don't have role models... in their own environments.

Teachers considered that while it was vital they related well to Māori and Pasifika students, they did not have to be of the same cultural background of students to be able to do so.

Peers: breaking down "us" and "them" barriers and the sanctity of the staffroom

Both teachers and students described how they related to each other as peers rather than "teachers" and "students". Students talked about how teachers treated them as adults and respected them, and teachers discussed how relating to students as adults helped to prepare them for leaving school.

Teacher: *I think it is important to have an adult working relationship, that I'm not a teacher, I'm a tutor. That I treat them as a foreman would treat them, who's looking after their apprenticeship next year. I get them used to that type of relationship...*

Student: *The teacher are like us – they're just one of the boys. They're different from the other teachers. It feels like he's our mate, not just a teacher.*

Sharing experiences both inside and outside the classroom facilitated the development of peer relationships between students and teachers. Teachers outlined how they "lived and learnt" with students as their peers rather than being transmitters of information. Students also commented on how their teachers were learning with them.

Student: *We interacted differently with our teachers – they were more or less learning with us.*

These experiences enabled teachers to have a more informal relationship with students, and it was in these contexts that many of the discussions about students' futures took place. Teachers discussed, not just students' futures in terms of career and study interests, but also students' values, lifestyles, and personal aspirations.

Having high expectations and perseverance

Students talked about how they had a "clean slate" when they joined the programmes and how teachers believed they could do well, and did not judge them by their previous school record.

Student: *The teachers helped us a lot because they wanted to see us succeed as well – it wasn't just because they were paid to do it – they were quite humorous as well – we had some good laughs.*

The teachers did not have deficit views of student behaviour or achievement, and discussed how it was important that they did not "give up" on students. Students perceived their teachers to be "always there" for them and to have a personal interest in their future lives and careers.

Teacher: *...During interval I'm not rushing away to the staffroom for a staff briefing or to have a coffee, I'll be sitting around in the classroom possibly talking, not all the time, but just being more involved with them even during the lunch hour and after school. They just know that we're there to make contact with.*

Student: *Mr _____ is really full on – he will explain anything and go out of his way to help you – anytime, for anything – even out of course time.*

Leaders

The teachers discussed how they had a "tough love" approach to leadership which combined a sense of humour with clear boundaries and consequences. The teachers had clear conceptions of their multiple roles as leaders, and well developed behaviour management skills. As the students put it, their teachers were easy to talk to and not "grumpy" like other teachers.

Student: *The teachers are very experienced in the outdoors, they know what they are talking about. They're not grumpy, they became more like friends.*

Providers of a safe environment which supported self-esteem

Teachers acknowledged that students would not be able to learn unless they felt comfortable in the environment they were in. Teachers carefully selected learning situations or work placements in which students would feel both culturally and emotionally safe, and in which they would experience success.

Teacher: *It's my role to initially, at the beginning of the year, to set tasks so that they will taste success... [For example] Putting them into the work place where their needs are catered for...*

What does the New Zealand literature say about relationship building?

There is a growing body of research that discusses the impact of teachers on student learning, and the importance of good quality student-teacher relationships and high expectations (for example, Hattie, 2002). In Hawk et al. (2001), McKinley (2000), and Bishop et al. (2001) these "good" or "effective" teacher behaviours and practices are framed as providing support for Māori or Pasifika students. In this study it was clear that most students, regardless of their ethnicity or gender, responded well to teachers who displayed these characteristics and practices. These teachers created a trusting environment in which students felt comfortable about discussing their future.

Summary: what worked?

A key feature of how transition support was provided to the students was the way it was embedded within the programme they were studying. As one teacher said, “It comes at them from everywhere!” This support was not just an add-on at the end of the year, but was infused throughout students’ whole programme of study, and provided throughout the year, by a range of people, and in a range of different formats. The transition support that teachers offered was usually provided in the context of a trusting environment in which students felt comfortable about discussing their career aspirations.

Another key facet of the transition support provided to students was the way information and advice was combined with work placements, tertiary courses, and other “real” experiences which enabled students to sample life outside school, clarify their career interests, and find out more about the worlds of work and tertiary study.

In summary, this support was:

- Embedded throughout the courses and within practical assessments;
- Provided in the context of a trusting relationship;
- Provided by the organisation of learning experiences related to individuals’ interests;
- Provided through informal on-going individual discussions in class-time;
- Provided through whole class discussions, activities, and trips;
- Provided through life-skills or employment skills classes;
- Provided through work placements and contact with employers;
- Provided through contact with the tertiary environment; and
- Enabled students to try out the theory learnt at school in the “real” world.

In terms of the different sources and types of support provided to students, there was no one fit for all. Students valued the support that was related to their particular interest, whether that was a job or a tertiary course. Students valued the opportunities they had to explore different career options, and the people who assisted them to find courses, jobs, and apprenticeships.

From an analysis of the data from the longitudinal Canadian *Paths on Life’s Way* study, Andres (2003) discusses the significant role that secondary teachers and careers educators have in guiding students through their transition from school. She suggests they are critical gatekeepers and brokers who “do or should” possess key information about a range of qualifications and tertiary options. Although this is not a new role for careers staff or teachers, in New Zealand, similar to other countries, the proliferation of tertiary providers and courses, and changes to the skills and qualifications required in the workforce, have made the transition environment, and therefore this role more complex (Carpenter & Inkson, 1999; Elkin & Sutton, 2000).

This growth in the expectations of both teachers and careers educators in assisting students in their transition from secondary school poses a challenge for schools. Smith (1999) notes that the international literature suggests an increasing role for career guidance – but what form should this guidance take in schools, and who should provide it? Overseas studies suggest that, in schools, “vocational” teachers are increasingly taking on the role of career counsellors (Krei & Rosenbaum, 2001). The course or “vocational” teachers in this study took on the main role of providing transition support to students, and they played a crucial role in managing students’ access to transition information, assistance, and advice, and in providing individualised support to students. The role of these teachers encompassed not only that of a subject teacher, but also that of a role model and life coach, and a broker and filterer of career information. By taking on these multiple roles, teachers assisted students to gain greater understanding of themselves and their interests to help them unpack the range of career options available to them, and helped to find a pathway in which they were likely to experience success.

The nature of the connection between the teachers, and the school careers services varied between and within schools. Some teachers had close working relationships with their school

careers services, and some schools provided programmes in which the activities, knowledge, and skills of teachers and careers educators complemented each other. At other schools the teachers made few, if any, connections with school careers services and took most of the load of providing transition support. The challenge for schools highlighted in this study is, how can schools best utilise the knowledge, skills, and connections of these two groups of teachers so that they support and complement each other?

The schools in this study were in different ways, working towards providing some answers to this question. Many of the students were clear about the benefits of the approaches these schools were using which had assisted them to be prepared for the future.

We will leave the final summing up to three of the students in this study.

Student: *I can see where I'm going – my career goal – and I know what I'm aiming for. This course is designed for us to get there...*

Student: *It's fun. It's the best course I reckon...I met a lot of people that I didn't know and I've been to a lot of companies and done lots of things!*

Student: *It's just basically given me a kick start to the big wide world, about what's on offer out there.*

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