Title: SCHOOL TRANSITION: ASPIRATIONS AND INSPIRATIONS

Author: Lynette Longaretti

PhD Candidate
Faculty of Education
The University of Melbourne.

Paper presented at the AARE Conference, Adelaide,
November 2006

Submission to Conference Proceedings
ABSTRACT

School Transition: Inspirations and Aspirations

This paper reports students’ perceptions about their primary to secondary school transition. It specifically focuses on young adolescents’ concerns and the ways in which they cope with social emotional and academic demands during school transition.

Mixed methods data collection techniques were used to track the experiences of sixteen students during their final weeks of primary school and first year at secondary school. A snapshot of the findings emerging from the qualitative data, derived from multi-method interviews, questionnaire and student journals are considered.

Student concerns were analyzed into three broad and interrelated categories:
  a) relationships (with peers and teachers),
  b) curriculum and school organisation, and
  c) personal (about self).

Of special interest in this paper are the various ways in which students’ cope with the academic and social emotional demands they encounter. Of great significance is the profound impact aspirations and positive thinking have on the extent to which students cope with interpersonal and academic pressures during the school transition period.

Findings from this research challenge the practices in the Middle Years of Schooling and have important implications for curriculum, teaching and learning. Recommendations based upon these findings focus upon initiatives that promote a smooth transition for students.

Key words:
  Transition, coping, social emotional development, aspirations, positive thinking, self-concept, relationships, Middle Years of Schooling
INTRODUCTION

Previous research has shown that the transition from primary to secondary school (Year 6 – 7) is stressful for many students. Increase in psychological difficulties (anxiety) and a decline in feelings of self worth and school performance (Fenziel & Blyth, 1986; Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999 have been ascribed to school transition.

Whilst the literature in the fields of Educational School Reform and psychology acknowledge the critical years of early adolescence (10-15 years of age), school transition is not well studied in relation to early adolescence and social emotional coping. Existing research focuses on the general effect of school transition on students, especially the psychosocial difficulties (Fenziel & Blyth, 1986; Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999, and more recently, ineffective educational structures, curriculum, pedagogy and negative learning outcomes (Fenziel & Blyth, 1986; Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999. Significantly, there are a limited number of studies on primary/secondary school transition, from the perspective of students within the Australian and international contexts. Further, the views of young adolescents, in terms of coping with interpersonal relationships and school transition, has not been sufficiently emphasised in previous research.

The changes and pressures encountered by young adolescents during this critical event can overwhelm the coping strategies of students and can affect their learning (Fenziel & Blyth, 1986; Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999. Coping research specifically investigating school transition is instrumental in furthering understanding of student stress and their appraisal of issues. By exploring in depth the powerful perceptions of students in the moment of transition, this study contributes to the necessary “…complementary body of coping stories that tell what happens behind, within and around… more than numbers alone can tell us” (Fenziel & Blyth, 1986; Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999, p.101).

A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The main factors consistently reported in the literature that attribute to the difficulties of school transition relate to three domains: the broader social context, the organisational and the personal domains. For example, the implication of a rapidly changing social context for schools and education systems, transitional circumstances such as discontinuity in learning - the differences between primary and secondary school systems, increased anxiety and developmental changes (Dalin & Rust, 1996; ACSA, 1996; Luke, Elkins, Weir & associates, 2003).

When young adolescent students move from primary to secondary school they are expected to adjust to and make sense of the new school environment, a different schooling system (culture and structure) and changes
to friendships, during a phase of their lives already challenged by the profound developmental transformations characteristic of early adolescence (Braggett, Morris & Day, 1999).

It is well recognised that early adolescence is a complex time, the most dramatic stage in human development in terms of the magnitude of challenges and development (biological, cognitive, social and psychological) that occur. Young adolescent students are particularly challenged because the many changes they are subjected to do not necessarily occur at the same time or complete their trajectory at the same rate. They are interrelated and each are important to the individual in certain contexts, especially where emphasis is placed on personal (e.g. body image) and social concerns (e.g. peer approval).

Students individually negotiate their transition experience. Similarly, they experience anxiety at dissimilar levels, and cope with difficult situations in diverse ways. Coping involves investing one’s own personal resources (for example self-efficacy) or social support resources (for example seeking help from others) to deal with stressful situations. Researchers have indicated that personal coping resources and social support can lessen the impact of the strains on wellbeing (Fenzel & Blyth, 1986; Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999. Being secure in the resources of self-efficacy, perceived competence, friendships and social skills can assist students in managing the stresses they face at school. Furthermore, negative states can also move a person to strive to find positive meaning in the event, leading to the use of resources such as hope, social support and self esteem (Frydenberg, 2002).

Resilience research also indicates that protective factors (such as supportive relationships, sense of belonging and positive self esteem) can prevent or mitigate poor developmental outcomes in individuals at risk (Garmezy, 1985). Hope or aspirations may also operate as a resilience mechanism on the eventual coping of struggling students. Hence, it is important to explore students’ aspirations and their impact on coping.

For the developing adolescent the school social context is crucial, as many anxieties are school related. School related concerns widely shared by early adolescents relate to: the event of school transition, relationships with peers and teachers, school organisation (structure), academic performance and issues related to the self (self efficacy, self-concept, self-esteem) (Fenzel & Blyth, 1986; Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999. Young people must learn to cope with the complex and demanding situations in schools as well as in other areas of life, in order to develop the psychological conditions necessary to adapt constructively to other challenges and tasks.

Some features of secondary schools (larger classes, less autonomy and support, increased performance orientation) are associated with ineffective schooling, negative learning outcomes and negative identity development (Fenzel & Blyth, 1986; Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999. Consequently, the

Young adolescents also attach great importance to their social relationships. In particular, concerns about peer approval, and conflicts can create a variety of problems for the development of young adolescent students and subsequently can affect Year 6-7 transition (Fenzel & Blyth, 1986; Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999. Students need to be able to adapt continuously and have a positive orientation towards the future. Thus coping strategies become particularly important for young people in this period.

Of central importance to reform in the Middle Years of Schooling is the relationship between the developmental characteristics and the diverse needs of young adolescent students and the provision made for them within schooling system (Russell, Mackay & Jane, 2003). Recent Middle Years of Schooling reform initiatives have put in place some strategies that affirm the common needs of young adolescent students and that foster successful transition and positive academic outcomes. The changes are designed to improve the quality of education and specifically to increase student engagement with learning and enhance their sense of wellbeing and belonging in the educational community. Such strategies encompass reform in the areas of 
curriculum, interpersonal relationships and personal development and include: the continuity of curriculum; the provision of challenging curriculum; the inclusion of relevant learning and teaching; the creation of smaller schools/teams; the fostering of a sense of community and belonging; the provision of more adult support; the development of self-efficacy and the experience of positive emotions (Fenzel & Blyth, 1986; Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999.

Whilst these are substantial steps towards achieving relevant, meaningful and positive learning environments for young adolescents, it would be beneficial to gain students’ perspectives on what they see as being helpful and important for their learning and coping at school.

• What are students’ hopes and concerns?
• How do students cope with the academic and social emotional demands at school?
• What contributes to social emotional coping during school transition from Years 6-7?

This research described in the next section set out to explore the following questions in the context of school transition.

METHODOLOGY
This longitudinal study follows young adolescent students over a two-year period from year 6 to Year 7.
Students from three Victorian primary schools (from the Catholic, State and Montessori systems) within a similar geographical areas participated in the study.

A total of 141 students drawn from the three participating year six classes were initially surveyed to collect data and to obtain an insight into the students’ social and learning environment, as well as insight into their issues and concerns. From those surveyed sixteen Year 6 students volunteered to further participate in the research and agreed to be tracked over a two-year period, during Year 6 and Year 7. The average age of participants at the commencement of the study was 11.6 years.

The sixteen students (5 male, 11 female) entered 8 different secondary schools within and around the local area. Four Year 6 classroom teachers, eight secondary school homeroom teachers/coordinators and nine parents also participated in this study. In addition, 55 Year 7 students from three of the eight participating secondary schools volunteered to be surveyed in relation to their school transition and coping.

In this study it was deemed pertinent to focus on the lived experience of the students in order to elicit participant voices. Therefore a mixed method approach was adopted to provide an in-depth account of students’ experiences as:

“…to arrive at an appreciation of children’s innermost thoughts and feelings and to gain a picture of their subjective experience, we must employ a range of ethnographic techniques over the whole period of transition” (Fenzel & Blyth, 1986; Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999.

Mixed methods of collecting data included, multi methods interview (consisting of open ended questions, Card Sorting Tasks and Self Nominated Scenarios), Student School Transition Journals (electronic and hard copy format), Questionnaires and Document analysis. This paper will offer a snap shot of the emerging findings from the qualitative data set, in particular, those emerging from the student interviews, questionnaire and journals.

**Procedure**

Student, teacher and parent data was collected and analysed in three cycles during the transition period (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Data Collection and Analysis Period**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Pre- transition</th>
<th>Year 6, the last four weeks of Term 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 2</td>
<td>Post – transition</td>
<td>Year 7, first five weeks of Term 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 3</td>
<td>Post – transition</td>
<td>Year 7, last four weeks of Term 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Student data were collected during normal class time, except for the journal, which was ongoing and completed by students at various times as chosen by them. Journals were emailed or mailed to the researcher at the end of each academic term. These were then promptly returned to the students with comments. Most, but not all students consistently wrote in or completed their journals. Data generated from student journals were used to cross check student responses and to compare coping strategies, hopes and specific concerns.

**Card sorting tasks**

Two sets of Task Cards were compiled after examination of current literature on the Middle Years of Schooling and coping. Conditions for effective learning (Card set A) and coping strategies (Card set B) were individually listed on playing cards. The task cards were used to establish aspects of schooling the students’ considered important for learning and to identify students’ coping strategies and behaviours. Students were asked to sort the cards (*always, sometimes, never*) according to their importance for learning and frequency of use. During the interviews, some students gave explanations and illustrations for all cards as they progressed through the sorting task activities. Students listed additional learning conditions and coping strategies and behaviours on the blank cards provided.

**Open-ended Questionnaire**

Each student was asked to write their responses to two broad open – ended questions and to make further comments about their transition to secondary school. These questions were revisited with each student in the interviews. The questions included: *What are your hopes and dreams for the future? What are your concerns? What other comments would you like to make about school transition, learning and coping?*

**FINDINGS**

Consistent with the literature, the emerging findings of the study suggest that students face a variety of school related demands and anxieties pre and post-transition, and that a number of factors contribute to the extent to which early adolescents cope with those demands.

**Student Coping**

In this study, students perceived a range of academic tasks and interpersonal situations as demanding or causing stress or concern. Academic demands consisted of coping with difficult work and homework, managing an increasing homework load or experiencing learning difficulties in the classroom. Social emotional demands included personal problems (for example, fitting in, self-consciousness) and interpersonal conflicts with peers (friends/classmates) and teachers at school. Significant variables, which impacted on children’s coping during school transition, were *positive thinking, self–concept and supportive peer relationships*. Further analysis revealed these were also significant to students’ *aspirations*. This paper will report on the students’ aspirations and their significance to coping.
Aspirations

In answer to the research question, individual interview and questionnaire responses for the 16 case students produced themes in the domains of relationships aspirations, educational aspirations, personal - life aspirations and work aspirations. Some commonalities were apparent in several themes across domains.

Figure 1: Students’ Aspirations Cycle 1-3: pre and post transition

Relationship aspirations
Figure 1 shows that six of the sixteen students named aspirations about school/peer relationships. These consisted of “making friends”, and “keeping friends”. In Cycles 2 and 3, four students retained their relationship aspirations but these had expanded to include, being with friends in year 8, and for Danielle, “having a set group of friends to go out with and to have fun when you’re older” (Danielle, Interview, Cycle 3, p.2).
For Natalie, having “…life time friends, ones you could trust and depend on” was pivotal. Natalie consistently attributed success at school and in life to the support she had around her. She explained, “Like at the start of the year, I didn’t think I could get through it but I had my friends who were really nice and I became more confident in myself. I know I have that now so I won’t give up ‘cos I know I can work out a problem (Natalie, Interview, Cycle 3, p.2).

Educational Aspirations
Of the 16 participants, 6 students held hopes for achieving ‘good grades’ and ‘performing well’ in school prior to the transition to secondary school. “Getting good grades” was also a common concern for the majority of students in Cycle 2 of the study. School performance aspirations remained stable for four of these students early in Year 7. “Passing tests” and “finishing all the work on time”, “not getting into trouble”, “passing year 7” and “getting good grades in year 8” were additional hopes for four of the participants. Only four students named specific, ambitious plans for future education, either VCE, University or trade school, leading to a career. They perceived secondary school as an opportunity to “learn new things”, to ‘achieve well” and to lead to “getting good jobs”. For example, Millie held long term aspirations, with future education and career in mind. Millie consistently reported to aspire to work towards reaching her ambition, “to be a doctor”. The data reflects her desires to achieving this goal. For example, in Year 6 Millie reported to be “working hard”, and wanted “to be smarter”, qualities she associated with becoming a doctor. At the beginning of Year 7 Millie revealed her plan of transferring into a different “private” school when she reached Year 10 to better her chances of obtaining high results so she could enter University and fulfill her dream of obtaining a medical degree. Millie was unique to the sample as no other student in this study held such a clear vision of their future.
A few students recognized secondary school as the pathway to future work (e.g. “getting a good job”). However, these students did not specify their aspirations. For instance, despite aspiring to “do well at new subjects to help you get a good job”, Ayden and Marshall, in Year 7, were both unable to stipulate what they had in mind for future work. Marshall could only suggest doing “something with my hands…I am good with my hands” and Ayden hoped “to be my own boss”. Both boys held vague and restricted visions of realizing their aspiration (e.g. “passing my subjects and getting good grades at school”). In contrast, Aldo, who also described himself as being “good with his hands”, was able to suggest ways to reach this aspiration.
He explained that, “by working with my dad at home, I learn how to make things…you know construct stuff”. Aldo was not able to expand on how his aspiration to “design and create” related to learning at school other than “we do wood work and stuff here”.

Despite not specifying educational aspirations some students did indicate their interest in attending University and alluded to ‘doing a course’ and ‘being at Uni [like my cousin]’, in future years. Others, like Chen were unsure what level or type of education was required for their future work aspirations. In outlining ways to accomplishing future employment in the “IT” (Information Technology) profession, Chen suggested, “I think there is a special school you go to…(pause) or you just get a job when you finish school” (Chen, Interview Time 3, p.3).

**Work Aspirations**

Unlike Millie and Aldo, most participants did not specify ideas for future possible jobs. A few, however, dreamed of improbable work aspirations such as professional sports and busking or had vague ideas about their future work, for example, “work for myself”, “do art” and “I just want to play music”. Other students disclosed strong work ethics required to be successful (e.g. ”you have to work hard”, “pass at school” and “work long hours”).

**Personal / life aspirations**

Personal / life aspirations related to self development and self image were consistently named by five students across time in this study. For example, Natalie and Suzanne’s aspirations, which centred on “being liked” and “accepted”, remained stable over the two years. In Year 7 Danielle explained that she wished to be able to “look back on her school days and remember them for their fun and good times” (Danielle, Interview Time 3, p. 1). Danielle hoped for happiness and fond memories across all three time points in this study. In contrast, Millie’s personal / life aspirations changed from hoping to be smart, to fitting in (Cycle 2) and “not forcing myself”, and “enjoy my time at school” (Cycle 3). Aspirations related to coping were also named by students in Cycle 2 (early year 7) of the study. Common aspects of students hopes in this domain included “coping with school work”, “deal with things when they get hard, like in Year 10 and stuff” and “being able to sort out my problems”, all of which contributed to general happiness and well being.

**Changing aspirations**

It was common for students to differ in their hopes across the three cycles. For example in Cycle 1, pre transition Stefan hoped for “…learning new things, doing different subjects such as chemistry and mechanics”. In Cycle 3 at the end of Year 7, he hoped to, “make more friends and get to know more people” as he felt he did not “really know that many people at school yet, and it’s nearly the end of the year” (Stefan, Cycle 3. Interview, p. 1).

Allie by contrast commenced this study in year 6 by having no aspirations. When asked, what are your hopes and dreams (for the future) she responded, “None...Holidays! “I get good grades and stuff”. (Allie, questionnaire, Cycle 1, qu. 2). Allie was quite confident of her performance in school, she did not think beyond her present day situation and the school context. By Cycle 2 however, Allie hoped to “go well”, and “get good grades” (Allie, questionnaire, Cycle 2, qu. 2), “keep her new friends from year 7”, and “be with them in Year 8 (Allie, Interview, Cycle 2, p1). By the end of Year 7 Allie hoped for “loyal friends”, and to “get good grades to get a good job”.

**From hoping to coping**

Figure 2 outlines the pathways to coping for three students, Millie, Natalie and Aldo. For these students, having aspirations inspired them to move beyond difficult circumstances, cope with difficulty and look towards the future. Their self confidence, positive thinking, friends and personal goals gave them the direction and inspiration to move forward and make positive changes out of the turbulent times they faced in Year 7. Having hopes helped shift students’ from negative to positive thinking. Furthermore, it helped broaden their focus to incorporate future personal and academic goals.

**Table 2: Students’ trajectory to coping**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Coping</th>
<th>Hope</th>
<th>Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Millie</td>
<td>Fitting in</td>
<td>Talk to others</td>
<td>Career</td>
<td>Finish VCE , Top scores, Change schools, Attend University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self Confidence Spirit</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self Reflection Competence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive attitude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Aldo
Fitting in Group acceptance Fighting
Talk to mum Teacher / adult intervention Aggressive Self confidence
Career Design Sport - basketball
Get good grades Finish school
Positive attitude

Natalie
Loss of friendships Being ‘outed’
Relies on self Self Confidence Competence Positive attitude
Relationships Creating close, life long friendships
Make new friends Fit in Learn to trust each other

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Common links connect these themes and provide answers to the research question: What hopes, do young adolescents in transition hold? Although school transition experience was different for each student their aspirations and concerns played a key part in how they coped with the social emotional challenges they encountered in Year 7.

For the students in this study, hopes for the future were fixed in their current school experiences and relationships. Overall, students found it difficult to express their hopes beyond the present school year. This is quite comprehensible given that the transition from primary to secondary school is quite intense for students. Aspirations beyond the school context are, for the moment, ‘out of sight and mind’ for a number of students. It is possible that students at this phase of schooling were concentrating on adjusting to the new environment, fitting in, and coping with the social emotional and academic demands they encountered.

Participants who used positive thinking and social support were able to envision future goals and dreams. A persistent optimism, a drive to make the best of difficulties, filled the hopes of those students who experienced difficulties in their first year of secondary school. Students generally wished to further their learning and build positive relationships. Many showed to value ‘work’ and aimed to one day ‘have a job’. These students also envisaged themselves as productive copers.

The study found that the majority of those students most challenged by school transition held strong aspirations. But the study’s results also suggest a variety of aspirations, from specific and achievable for most, to dubious, for a few. This diversity of aspirations may provide a critical link in the developmental trajectories of students who go on to achieve at school, despite failures and setbacks.

Closer investigation of the assets and hopes, not just the deficits, of young adolescent students is essential for determining their social emotional and academic needs. To date, few investigations have explored the factors that contribute to social emotional coping, particularly among students who experience difficulties in adjusting to the new school and social environment during the transition to secondary school; this study provides one such body of evidence. This study through the narratives of students also reveals those factors that are helpful for a smooth transition. Additional studies of young adolescents are needed to illuminate other processes that support students’ social emotional coping at school.

Educators can learn from the words of these adolescents. They can collaborate with other educators and
adults to arrange for the broad range of experiences that will instill hopes for rich futures. They can nurture the inner strengths of all students, as part of the school community and enhance self esteem, healthy development and competence (e.g. coping skills) through positive relationships, for all students who need connection.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Difficult school situations, such as demanding academic tasks and interpersonal situations can affect the development of a healthy personality and interpersonal relations of early adolescence. Schools need to consider ways in which to minimise factors that cause anxieties, and maximize those that promote connections, particularly for young adolescents during the transitional years. Transition programs and Middle Years of Schooling curriculum should embody the promotion of healthy development (e.g. positive thinking, self esteem), relationship building and social emotional learning.

Overall results of this study emphasise the importance of supportive friendships in students’ lives.

Supportive relationships, particularly with peers function as protective factors as they enhance the adaptability of a person (Fenzel & Blyth, 1986; Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999 and are a critical pathway to learning (Fenzel & Blyth, 1986; Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999. Teachers, as much as parents and peers, are needed to complement healthy development. It can be inferred from the findings that greater attention to building trust, getting to know students, their aspirations and individual learning needs is required.

When students encounter problems they look towards themselves, their friends (and parents and teachers) for assistance. Friendships allow adolescents a safe environment in which to be themselves and to explore different aspects of themselves. Importantly, friends can help with ways to deal with problems and can help individuals to use their personal resources (Wentzel, 1999). In this study, friends helped inspire each other and were the focus of future hopes and visions of happiness.

Because of the significance of supportive friendships in development and learning during early adolescence, key emphasis should be placed on schools providing students with opportunities that foster and encourage the development of positive peer networks, productive coping strategies and effective interpersonal problem solving skills, such as conflict resolution skills. For example, when students’ initially enter secondary school, school staff should promote the development and continuation of existing and new friendships across all year levels. Additionally, by continuing structural reform efforts in the Middle Years of Schooling (Fenzel & Blyth, 1986; Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999 such as, the organisation of smaller classes, teaming, the implementation of teaching styles and approaches that promote and encourage student centered learning, and cooperative grouping, students’ needs can be further accommodated. Multi-age, programs such
as Buddy Systems, Electives and Peer Support, which emphasise peer interaction, cooperation and collaboration, as well as encourage and promote fundamental social skills, could also be implemented to nurture a culture of inclusiveness and care within the school.

Schools can assist students further in their coping by exploring and addressing their hopes and aspirations. Teachers can build on these by helping students clarify their goals, ambitions and inspirations. Even though at the beginning of their secondary school journey, it is important that students see and find purpose and direction to their education. Exploring students’ assets and aspirations can be one way to inspire young adolescent learners and can expose students to a variety of experiences to help broaden their outlook.

The findings and implications of this study considered in conjunction with key elements for effective transition provide a basis for understanding factors that contribute to early adolescent social emotional coping during the transition from primary to secondary school.

CONCLUSION

Whilst it is generally accepted that school-related demands are a ‘normal’ part of the change process during the transition from primary to secondary school (Years 6-7), it is essential that school personnel specifically understand the needs of young adolescent students’, particularly the development of positive thinking, self-concept and supportive interpersonal relationships. In order to support them in their development, coping and learning, schools need to comprehend and appropriately respond to students’ thinking, feelings and behaviours and to further explore student aspirations as well as anxieties and school related stresses. It is crucial for schools to assist students to strengthen their personal coping resources and social support networks, as these are instrumental in students coping. Furthermore, the ways in which students’ cope with the pressures encountered during early adolescence may establish patterns for adult life (Fenzel & Blyth, 1986; Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999).

It is imperative that schools, in planning and supporting successful transition and positive learning outcomes do so systematically by acknowledging and supporting the developmental path of each young adolescent student, and by providing opportunities, experiences, approaches and structures that are responsive, relevant and flexible to the needs of all students in the Middle Years of Schooling. Schools could begin by actualizing a carefully planned transition program that encourages and sustains productive coping mechanisms. This includes fostering in all students a positive self concept, providing opportunities for the development of favorable relationships in a supportive and cooperative climate and incorporating curriculum that assists students in goal setting, problem solving and reflection. Combined with elements of a quality transition program, such as teaming, smaller classes, continuity of curriculum and challenging curriculum, schools may curtail some of the school-related tensions that magnify anxiety and hinders productive coping, good learning and wholesome enjoyment for schooling. In this way, students can make a gradual and smooth transition to secondary school.
REFERENCES


