

**National University of Ireland,  
Maynooth**

**The Challenge of Change:**

**An Investigative Study of the Transition Year in Six Schools**

**By**

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A dissertation submitted to the Education Department, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, in part fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Education Degree in School Leadership.

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## Declaration

**I declare that this dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree in this or any other university.**

Signed: Michael Boran

**Date: 1<sup>st</sup> May 2002**

**Michael Boran**

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*Michael Boran*

# Abstract

Firstly this study reviews the literature associated with change in order to get an overall picture of the challenges facing principals, teachers, students and all concerned with second level schools in Ireland today. The nineties are looked upon as a period of great innovation in Irish second level education. This study will focus on one particular change in the nineties, namely the mainstreaming of the Transition Year Programme in 1994.

Six different second level schools in the researchers immediate locality were chosen in order to investigate and evaluate the Transition Year Programme in the light of the aims set out by the Department of Education (1993).

In order to elicit information about the Transition Year Programmes in the six chosen schools, this broad study firstly surveyed the co-ordinators in each school by questionnaire. Five teachers from each school were then surveyed by questionnaire. Those teachers were selected from different subject areas. A random sample of twenty students was taken from each school and also surveyed by questionnaire. Finally the principals from each of the six schools were interviewed and the interviews were recorded on tape in an effort to establish what lessons about schools leadership and innovation can be learned from the Transition Year Programme. A summary of the major findings of this study are reported in chapter six.

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## **Introduction**

The 90's have been a decade of extensive innovation in Irish second-level education. At the centre of this innovation is curricular change. This curricular change was deemed necessary to correspond with and meet the demands of a complex and changing society. Education at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century no longer prepared individuals for secure life long employment in local industry or services. What were needed were individuals with a broad general education, good communication skills and a commitment to life long learning. The White Paper, *Charting our Education Future* (1995) is a response to this world change and “ sets out a framework for the development of education into the next century against a background of a rapidly and evolving society ”.

This study will look firstly on the effect this change has had on second level education in order to get an overall picture of the challenges facing the principals and teachers today. The study will then home in on one particular change of that era, namely the mainstreaming of the Transition Year Programme (1994).

The Transition Year Programme is offered to students at the commencement of their fourth year of the six-year cycle. Six different kinds of schools in the authors locality were chosen for this study in an attempt to investigate and evaluate the Transition Year Programme (1993) in the light of the aims set out by the Department of Education and Science. In broad terms the study will look at the opportunities this programme presents to teachers and schools to be innovative and experimental in designing a programme to suit the individual needs of their own students.

## **Rationale for the Study**

The author has chosen this topic because, having been involved with the Transition Year Programme as a teacher for the past seven years and having been a Transition Year - Year Head, he views it as an innovation with far reaching implications both for students and those in leadership positions in schools including principals, co-ordinators and staff members. The author is therefore familiar with the literature on Transition Year and is familiar with discussing various aspects of Transition Year with his colleagues. He is searching for answers challenging questions about how the programme could be improved and developed further in the light of the aims and Guidelines for Schools as laid down by the Department of Education (1993) in its booklet titled *Transition Year Programmes Guidelines for Schools*. The author considers the Transition Year Programme to be a curricular development which is different from other curricular changes in the past. Transition Year is not an imposed curricular change; schools opt to offer the Transition Year Programme. The Programme is not centrally prescribed or subject to a terminal examination. The school has the power to design a programme that suits the needs of its students. Transition Year is viewed therefore as a distinct programme in its own right. With this in mind the author was curious to investigate the programme in six different schools in his locality. The author is of the opinion that the Transition Year Programme offers an opportunity for genuine school development, within an individual school and this has implications for leadership at principal, coordinator, teacher, and whole staff levels.

The author views the Transition Year Programme as an innovation which facilitates the holistic development of all students progressing to the end of senior cycle. He views the programme as an opportunity to help students acquire knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes needed for citizenship in today's society without the pressures of an end of year exam. Having regard for the above mentioned, the author was curious to investigate the Transition Year Programme in six different schools in his locality. Having analyzed the data the author hopes to be able to pass on some guidance and advice to his colleagues and staff as a whole and also to anyone else to whom the study may be of interest. It is hoped that the analyzed data will add to existing knowledge and help further the development of the Transition Year Programme. In this regard it is felt the research is both timely and necessary.

### **Aims and Objectives of Present Study**

The study is an investigative study of the Transition Year Programme in six different schools in my locality. The schools chosen were:

1. A Private Fee Paying Single Sex Boarding School
2. A Community College (Mixed)
3. A Voluntary Secondary School (All girls)
4. A Community School (All girls)
5. A Voluntary Secondary School (All boys)
6. A Post Primary V.E.C. (Mixed)

In the first three schools the Transition Year Programme was compulsory, whilst in the later three the Transition Year Programme was optional.

In broad terms the study will attempt to investigate the Transition Year Programme experiences in each school in the light of the guidelines laid down by the Department of Education (1993). The programme will be investigated from the perspectives of students, teachers, coordinators and principals in the different schools in order to get an overall rounded view of the Transition Year Programme as it is today in the above schools.

### **In relation to students**

A random sample of twenty students was taken from each school and surveyed by questionnaire in order to find out the following information:

1. To what extent Transition Year had given them a) a desire for knowledge, b) assisted them in taking responsibility for their own learning c) enabled them to become more mature, autonomous, participative and responsible members of society.
2. How did they perceive an educational experience such as Transition Year without the pressure of an exam-oriented year? Was it a worthwhile experience? What aspects of the Transition Year appealed a) most to them, b) least to them?
3. To what extent did a) changes take place in student/teacher relationships b) changes in teaching methodologies as perceived by the students?
4. To what extent did it enable them to a) make decisions about future careers b) to make informed decisions about possible subject uptake for their Leaving Certificate c) obtain a broad range of skills (e.g. Computers, Art, Photography etc.) d) engage in work experience.
5. Their perceptions on compulsory/optional matters of Transition Year.

### **In Relation to Teachers**

Five Teachers from each school were surveyed by questionnaires. The teachers were selected from different subject areas e.g. Math's/Science, English/languages, practical subjects, work experience, PE/personal development. The teachers were surveyed in order to investigate the following.

1. How they were coping with the freedom to design new courses in accordance with the needs of their students.
2. How teachers are coping with the new style of teaching called for in a programme such as Transition Year Programme.
3. The extent to which teachers are involved in planning and decision making in relation to the Transition Year Programme.
4. The satisfactory/unsatisfactory nature of in-service training, and support structures available for teaching the Transition Year Programme.
5. The change if any in relationships between teachers and their students.
6. Other factors such as gender and teaching experience of those teaching the Transition Year Programme.

### **In Relation to Coordinators**

One Coordinator from each school was surveyed by questionnaire in order to investigate the following:

1. Issues in relation to planning, implementation, in-service, decision-making, and evaluation for further development. To discern if an empowerment process is being widely promoted and supported in a variety of ways.

2. The curricular nature and content of Transition Year Programme in order to establish degrees of difference or similarities in structure and content of the respective programme i.e. are their emerging patterns.
3. The optional/compulsory nature of the programme in an attempt to investigate the overall effect of this on Transition Year.
4. The value of a work experience module in preparing young people for the world of work and adult life.
5. Evaluation of the Transition Year Programme. Who does it? When and why?
6. Other issues such as participation of students, gender of coordinators, age profile, post of responsibility, support structures for coordinators, facilities available etc.

### **In Relation to Principals**

The Principals of each school were interviewed and the interviews were recorded on tape. The interviews attempted to elicit in broad terms the extent to which the principals in the selected schools are both leaders and managers in relation to successful implementation and daily running of the Transition Year Programme in their schools and the extent to which empowerment processes were widely promoted and supported in a variety of ways. Hand (1995) in his study on the Transition Year Programme informs us that “many of the leadership opportunities afforded to principals in relation to the Transition Year Programme have neither been identified nor grasped”. Specifically the principals were asked to describe their schools in terms of its educational focus, ethos, and their reasons for offering the programme on a compulsory or optional basis. They were questioned about issues such as the existence of voluntary contributions and where it existed, how the money was spent and who

decided how to best spend this money? They were asked to clarify how the Transition Year Programme fits in relation to overall structures within their schools. They were asked to clarify who was involved in decision making processes in relation to Transition Year Programme i.e. curricular content, planning and evaluation and whether teachers were allowed time tabled planning time for discussing issues in relation to the Transition Year Programme. They were questioned on the evaluation of the programme, when did it take place, who was involved and were asked what was the purpose of the evaluation. They were questioned about the involvement if any of parents and their opinions were sought as to what the main factors were which contributed to the overall programme success or failure i.e. to identify strengths and weaknesses of the programme within the individual schools. They were asked to comment on the role of the coordinator in particular, and to identify qualities they would expect their respective coordinators to have.

# **Chapter 1. Literature Review**

## **Chapter 1: Literature Review**

### **1.1 Introduction**

In Ireland, the nineties marked the most comprehensive review of educational policies and structure since the foundation of the state. Educational change is now an inevitable feature of our society and educational system. It is the challenge which confronts our society, policy makers, principals, teachers, parents, and students. The key issue today is how to take this change on board and manage it for the betterment of our young people whom the system is designed to serve.

This chapter will review broadly and briefly the research associated with implementing and managing educational change in our present era. The chapter will start by setting educational change in context by analysing societal changes today. It will then proceed by analysing what the research has to say about the effects of educational change on our teachers, school cultures, and its implications for principals. The chapter will also deal with the educational change process and the lessons to be learned from research on the implementation of change.

### **1.2 The Nineties an Era of Educational Change in Ireland**

In Ireland there has been intense debate throughout the nineties on the most appropriate framework for the future development of education. Documents such as, *Reviews of National Policies for Education* Paris O.E.C.D. (1991), *Education for a Changing World*

Green Paper on Education (1992), *The National Educational Convention* (1994), The White Paper *Charting our Education Future* (1995), will change the focus of many aspects of our educational system for the future.

During the nineties these changes attracted an unprecedented level of interest from educationalists and the community in general. There was intense debate and public interest was high. The level of perceived importance of education was so striking, that resulting from a series of Green Paper seminars held around the country, more than a thousand formal submissions were made to the Department of Education.

Following the Green Paper 1992 the then Minister of Education, Niamh Breathnach called for a National Educational Convention to be set up in Dublin Castle, at which all the major partners in education were invited to attend. The Minister has in mind a multilateral symposium offering each of the major partners the opportunity to present their positions on key issues and to engage in constructive dialogue and explore the possibilities for consultation between them. This symposium took place under the Secretariatship of Prof. John Coolahan of N.U.I. Maynooth. This convention turned out to be a huge success and was later to be the germinating seed that produced many of the educational changes we have today. This convention was a consultative process of multilateral dialogue with a genuine search for understanding through discussion and debate. It attracted a lot of international interest and debate on the formulation of educational policy. Important discussions on issues such as pluralism, partnerships, accountability, ethos, governance of schools, the Irish Constitution and composition of boards of management were engaged in. These discussions

provided the nucleus for what was later to become the White Paper '95 Charting our Education Future. According to Coolahan (1995), “ the nature of the consultative process which took place between the publication of the Green Paper and White Paper was unprecedented in range, depth, and character. It was a major educational process and of great benefit to Irish democracy”.

The then Minister for Education, Niamh Breathnach in her opening address at an N.U.I. Maynooth two day conference to international educationalists, Irish Government analysts, academic researchers, and practitioners in all fields of education described the White Paper as a “comprehensive agenda for change which was to be implemented on a partnership basis, i.e. a firm commitment was needed from all partners to achieve change in order to meet the changing needs of students”. The Minister Breathnach (1995) went on to say that in her opinion “partnership was as relevant in the context of collegial responsibility within a school staff as it was in the national implementation of educational policy by the Minister, the Department of Education, and the partners in education”. She referred to the implementation of change as demanding “ first rate communication processes, the building of mature trust, sustained effort over time, and most of all a shared vision of education which must be centred on the student as an active agent in his/her learning”. Change therefore is inevitable and the key issue is how to take it on board and manage it for the overall benefit of our students.

### 1.3 The White Paper and Change

The White Paper *Charting our Educational Future* (1995) sets the overall direction and aim of educational change. In chapter one, 'The Philosophical Framework', two important issues were addressed. Firstly, the White Paper identified the core concerns of the State in relation to education as being the promotion of pluralism, equality, partnership, quality and accountability, together with the protection of fundamental civil and human rights and the promotion of social and economic well being. Secondly, the White Paper confirms the rights of individual schools and colleges and other institutions to develop and give effect to their own ethos and philosophical approach to education. The White Paper also delineated the legislative framework within which statutory change would be implemented. An important overarching theme is that of catering for the diversity of students participating presently and in the future in education. The White Paper states "an important objective in restructuring senior cycle as the holistic development of students progressing to the end of senior cycle". Who could disagree? However, how often today do hard-pressed principals and teachers have to sacrifice holistic development for the pressure of the points race?

Change by definition is dynamic and evolving, takes time to implement, is not easy or straightforward, and is upsetting and unsettling for people and organisations. It is difficult for all involved and is a learning phenomenon. The challenge for educational change is to bring about vibrant school cultures where teachers develop the confidence to change from

traditional ways to sharing good practices by working collegially for the good of the students.

#### **1.4 Changing Society – Changing Students**

In Ireland today our society is characterised by accelerating economic growth, social and technological change, growing cultural diversity, ideological uncertainty and insecurity associated with the breakdown of traditional norms. Today there are a variety of social factors that make it difficult for teachers to engage many of their pupils in meaningful learning. Teachers too are keenly aware that their jobs have changed immensely over the past decade or so. The classroom today has become a microcosm of society's problems. In many cases there is so much going on in the minds of students as a result of lone parents, fractured families, drug and alcohol abuse. All this makes it difficult for teachers and schools to enter the student's world. Many students as a result have become disengaged from learning. In this regard Hargreaves and Fullen (1992) comment as follows:

“Today many parents are busy ‘making it’. They have left hardly any time to devote to their families and relationships. ‘Quality-time’ has become a yuppie euphemism for hardly any time at all”.

Today our students are very much aware of the changing economic realities in our country. Consequently many of our students have part-time jobs working three and four evenings per week and week-ends and earning in excess of one hundred euros per week. It stands to reason if they have part-time jobs, then they are only part-time students. It also follows they

have plenty of money to spend and unfortunately very often this money makes its way towards alcohol and drugs. Such a society presents wide-ranging challenges for schools, teachers, and our educational system as a whole.

The impact of the knowledge explosion, the promotion of a knowledge-based society is everywhere. Our education system needs to incorporate technology both as a learning tool and a tool to enable young people to use this technology for the world they now live in. Today there is a decline in the status and influence of our churches. Advertising has become very persuasive and exploitive in relation to young people. All this puts its own pressures on schools and learning today. Over the past decade or so the education system has struggled to respond in an effective way to societal change.

### **1.5 What We Mean by Educational Change**

We have in Ireland witnessed numerous attempts at planned educational change over the last two decades. This is evident in the policy documents of the eighties and nineties. Consequently we have become more knowledgeable about the do's and don'ts of bringing about educational change. In order to understand the reactions and actions of individuals it is necessary to know and appreciate what change means to the teacher, principal, student, and the Department of Education. Fullan (1991) says, "change is not about putting into place the latest policy. It means changing the cultures of the classrooms, the schools, the districts, and the universities. There is much more to educational reform than people realise". If change is to be successful there must be respect for it and there must be a

willingness to master the change process in order to revitalise teaching and learning which is badly needed today. Fullan (1991) tells us that “it is not that people resist change so much as they do not know how to cope with it”. So it is necessary for individuals to become knowledgeable about the change process and to avail of the opportunities for bringing about improvements. Fullan (1991 p.14) informs us that there are at least two major purposes to schooling. Firstly to educate students in various academic or cognitive skills and knowledge and secondly to educate students in the development of individual and social skills and knowledge necessary to function occupationally and socio-politically in society. Superimposed on these two main purposes is what Dewey (1916 p.20) referred to as “opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group in which one is born”. The purpose of educational change is to help schools to attain their goals more effectively by replacing present structures, practices, programmes, with better ones. There has been much educational change over the last two decades yet the reality is that schooling appears pretty much the same as it has always been.

Cuban (1988) categorised innovations into first and second order changes in an attempt to explain why some changes are more successful than others. First order changes are those that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of what is currently done, “without disturbing the basic organisational features, without substantially altering the way that adults perform their roles”. Second order changes seek to alter the fundamental ways in which organisations are put together including new goals, structures and roles i.e. collaborative work cultures. Most educational change in Ireland to-date has been first order changes. Second order changes have yet to take off. Cuban (1988) puts it as follows: “Most reforms

have floundered on the rocks of flawed implementation. Many were diverted by the quiet but persistent resistance of teachers and administrators who, unconvinced by the unvarnished cheer of reformers, so minimal gain and much loss in embracing second order changes boosted by those who were unfamiliar with the classroom as a work place. The first order changes succeeded while the second order changes were either adapted to fit what existed or sloughed off, allowing the system to remain essentially untouched. The Chinese saying goes, "the ingredients change but the soup remains the same".

The challenge for the twenty first century for teachers and schools will be to deal with more second order changes such as changes which effect the culture, structure, and teaching practices of schools. Fullan (1991) states " in the past we have often worked on the notion that if we just "fix it" and if all performed their roles better we will have improved education.

### **1.6 Educational Change – The Realities for Teachers**

The daily subjective realities of teachers have been well-documented (House and Lapan, 1978; Huberman, 1983; Jackson, 1968; Lortie, 1975 and Rosenholtz, 1989). Fullan (1991) paints the picture as "one of limited development, of technical culture". Teachers are uncertain about how to influence students, especially in relation to non-cognitive goals. Their teaching decisions are often taken on pragmatic trail and error grounds with little or no opportunity for reflection or thinking through their rationale. Teachers must deal with constant daily disruptions within the classroom, in managing discipline and inter personal

conflicts, and from outside the classroom in collecting money for school events, making announcements, dealing with the principal, parents, and office staff. Fullan (1991) informs us that “the rewards are having a few good days, covering the curriculum, getting a lesson across, having an impact on one or two students. Teachers constantly feel the critical shortage of time”.

Huberman (1983), based on his own investigations and reviews of other research summarises the “classroom press” that exerts daily influences on teachers:

*The press for immediacy and concreteness: teachers engage in an estimated 200,000 interchanges a year, most of them spontaneous and requiring action.*

*The press for multidimensionality and simultaneity: teachers must carry on a range of operations simultaneously, providing materials, interacting with one pupil and monitoring the others, assessing progress, attending to needs and behaviour.*

*The press for adapting to ever changing conditions or unpredictability: schools are reactive because they must deal with unstable input, classes have different “personalities” from year to year, a well planned lesson may fall flat, what works for one child is ineffective with another, what works one day may not work the next.*

*The press for personal involvement with students: teachers discover that they need to develop and maintain personal relationships and that for most students meaningful interaction is a precursor to academic learning.*

The “classroom press” according to Huberman (1983 p.33) effects teachers in a number of ways “it draws their focus to day to day effects or short term perspectives. It isolates them

*from other adults, especially meaningful interactions with colleagues, it exhausts their energy, it limits their opportunities for sustained reflection about what they are doing”.*

Rosenholtz (1989) studied 78 schools in the state of Tennessee. She classified the schools as “stuck”, “in between”, or “moving”. Her study indicated that schools in which teachers had a shared consensus about the goals and organisation of their work was more likely to incorporate new ideas directed to student learning. In contrast, teachers who worked in “low consensus schools” more commonly skirted the edge of catastrophe alone learning the lesson that they must shoulder classroom burdens by themselves, not imposing on one another.

For many teachers in the classroom there is no reason to believe in change. House (1974 p.73) explains this as follows:

“The personal costs of trying new innovations are often high ... and seldom is there any indication that innovations are worth the investments”.

Initially teachers become more concerned with how the change is going to effect them both in and out of the classroom. Lortie (1975) states “the teachers ethos is conservative, individualistic, and focuses on the present. Secondly when change is imposed from the outside it is bitterly resented”. Cooper (1988 p.45) reminds us “that the outside looking in is different from the inside looking out”.

Change for teachers involves changes in goals, skills, philosophy, beliefs, behaviour, and practices it is conceived as being multidimensional. According to Fullan (1991 p.37) there are at least three components or dimensions at stake in implementing any new programme:

1. The possible use of new or revised materials.
2. The possible use of new teaching approaches i.e. new teaching strategies or activities.
3. The possible alteration of beliefs e.g. pedagogical assumptions and theories underlying new policies or programs.

In addition to those three components, change must take place in teaching practice in order for the change to be effective. As Charters and Jones (1973) observed “if we do not pay careful attention to whether change in practice has actually occurred we run the risk of appraising non events”.

Much of our teaching today in Ireland remains content-centred rather than student-centred. Our students feel they are passive recipients of knowledge, which in turn is used to get them the required points for entry to an appropriate third level course. A possible reason for the large number of dropouts in the system is that despite the introduction of the re-structured senior cycle in 1994 “the system was not flexible enough to cater for all students”.

### **1.7 What Makes Change Work for Teachers?**

Changes in the culture of teaching and the culture of schools are required. It is only when teachers are interacting professionally that decisions can be made about the degree to which change is working in schools. The principal has a very important role to play in ensuring effective change takes place, but also in enabling teachers to become effective agents of

change. If leadership is weak then disillusion follows. It is important to delegate and empower teachers to perform to their best possible capabilities. Teachers should feel proud to be involved and to be allowed space to grow and develop. It is important for principal and teachers to operate as a team and hold regular meetings wherein recognition is given to teachers for work done. As Rosenholtz (1989) puts it “teaching is a winner when teachers are engaged in a collective rather than in an individual enterprise and when evaluation and analysis are carried out in collaboration with the colleagues”.

### **1.8 Factors Which Inhibit Change.**

The culture of the examination system restricts the practices of teachers in the classroom. The Irish curriculum is a tradition which survives because it is embedded into institutional structure and cultural tradition. How teachers get their students to perform in the Leaving Certificate examination is taken as a yardstick of their success as teachers. This examination therefore determines the style of teaching required in the classroom, a style that is by and large didactic where coverage and mastery of the subject content are at a premium.

A mismatch between the curriculum goals and assessment exists. The standardised testing system is very different from the conception embodied in the curriculum. Outcomes should be more concerned with the manor in which people think rather than the amount of knowledge content. Due to the nature of our exam system, teachers find it hard to change their practices.

There is in the Irish system a heavy reliance by teachers on textbooks. Textbooks are judged by teachers according to the extent to which they reach out and catch what appears on an examination paper. As a result of this textbook dependency, teachers rarely engage with the colleagues in critical analysis about appropriate teaching methods. Teacher training today fails to equip teachers for the realities in the classroom. Control and discipline are often the major preoccupation of teachers.

### **1.9 The Education Change Process.**

Research in the 1970's and 1980's by educationalists such as Firestone and Corbet (1987), Fullan (1985), Clark, Lotto, and Astuto (1984), Huberman and Miles (1984) "suggests that in relation to educational change there are no hard and fast rules but that the uniqueness of the individual setting is a crucial factor, i.e. what works in one situation may not work in another".

This makes change difficult, requiring time, support, and trust between teachers and policy makers. Most researchers agree that there are three broad phases to the change process. Phase one being "Initiation". This leads up to the decision to adopt or proceed with the change. Phase two is referred to as "Implementation". This involves the first experience of attempting to put the change into practice. Phase three is called "Continuation". This refers to whether the change gets built in and accepted by the system or whether it fails to be accepted and disappears. The total time frame from initiation to institutionalisation can take

from three to five years. The clear picture arising from those three phases is that change is a process and not an event.

### **1.10 Implementing Change**

Linda Darling-Hammond (1990) on analysing case studies of policy implementation by the California State Department of Education said that there were some important lessons about the implementation of change to be learned from the case studies. Firstly, the policy must be well communicated if it is to be well understood. Meaningful discussions and professional development at all levels of the system are critical components of such communication i.e. directives are not enough. Secondly, policies do not land in a vacuum; they land on top of other policies. Thirdly, if policy makers want to change teaching they must pay attention to teacher knowledge, they must look beyond curriculum policies to those policies that control teacher education and certification as well as on going professional development and evaluation. Fourthly, the process of change is slow and difficult, it requires perseverance and investments in those things that allow teachers as change agents to grapple with trying out, constructing, and re-constructing new ways of thinking and teaching.

Milbrey Wollin McLoughlin (1987), in a paper she prepared for the centre for policy research in education for the Department of Education U.S.A., cites “the obvious conclusion running through her research on implementing change is that it is very difficult to make things happen primarily because policy makers can’t mandate what happens. She says successful policy implementation critically depends on two broad factors, namely local

capacity and will". According to her successful implementation requires a combination of pressure and support. Pressure on its own cannot bring about changes in attitudes and beliefs and routine practices. Support is needed to enable implementation. A further lesson to be learned from the implementation process is that change is ultimately a problem of the smallest unit that is the teacher in the classroom. Organisations do not innovate or implement changes rather individuals do. Finally McLoughlin (1987) states "that incremental, creeping, locally defined change is often the best as such a change is less likely to disrupt routines and established practices. This may take more time but once in place it is more stable".

### **1.11 Fullan's Lessons of Change**

Fullan (1983) identified eight lessons associated with change:

Lesson 1. *You cannot mandate what matters. The more complex the change is the less it can be forced.* The complex goals of change are skills, creative thinking, and committed action on the part of teachers.

Lesson 2. *Change is a journey not a blue print. Change is non-linear and loaded with uncertainty.* Thus a learning attitude and structure for problem solving is essential.

Lesson 3. *Problems are our friends.* Success in school change is more likely when problems are treated as natural phenomenon.

Lesson 4. *Vision and strategic planning come later.* Spending too much time on planning is a mistake. "Ready, fire, aim" is the more fruitful sequence.

Lesson 5. *Individualism and collectivism must have equal power.* Successful change is a process of overcoming isolation, while not succumbing to groupthink.

Lesson 6. *Neither centralisation nor decentralisation works.* We know for two decades or more that neither top down or bottom up change works. A mixture of both is required.

Lesson 7. *Connection with the wider environment is critical.* To prosper organisations must be plugged in to their environments, responding to and contributing to the issues of the day.

Lesson 8. *Every person can contribute to change.* It is only by individuals taking action for their own environments that there is any chance for meaningful change.

The challenge of change for schools is to master Fullan's eight lessons of change as a basis for action. Internally this means developing school cultures that feature norms of collaboration, teacher learning, sense of purpose, restructuring timetables etc. Externally it means developing school cultures that form an alliance with parents and local communities.

### **1.12 The Culture of Schools**

Stoll and Fink (1996:83) state, "because culture is created by its participants it inevitably changes as participants change, although it can also be a stabilising force, particularly for longer standing members. It presents therefor the paradox of both being static and dynamic." A major strand of change concerns the culture of the school. Hargreaves (1991) identified four types of school cultures namely, fragmented individualism, collaboration, balkanisation and contrived collegiality. Research has shown that schools tend to have isolated or individualistic cultures in which teachers tend not to work with each other or

exchange ideas on a sustained basis. Research has also shown that where collaborative work cultures exist in which collegiality focuses on teaching and learning, there is a strong difference in the quality of learning both for teachers and students. Where a culture of balkanisation exist, cliques of teachers form intensive subgroups. This culture is characterised by a strong loyalty within the subgroup but there is little identity with the school as a whole and hence little possibility for whole school reform. Finally contrived collegiality refers to those schools where teachers may be participating in a site-based structure, but it has not translated into deeper collaborative structures. Also within this type of culture we have restructuring but not reculturing taking place.

### **1.13 Approaches to Culture**

According to Law and Glover (2000) *there are two approaches to culture in schools namely the systems approach and the cultural approach. The system approach can be seen as either "open" or "closed" depending on whether or not schools interact with their environment. In the cultural approach people become central i.e. the culture of the school depends on individual's attitudes and perceptions.* Here the challenge for management is twofold, firstly there is a need to create situations where individual ideals, aspirations and practices can be harnessed for the benefit of the school and secondly the principal needs to formulate his/her vision of the schools mission, its aims and ways people might contribute to its corporate life. The emphasis is a shift from systems to people.

Stoll and Fink (1996:82) suggest that, “culture describes how things are and acts as a screen or lens through which the world is viewed.” Handy (1976) identifies four different types of organisational cultures namely, club cultures, role cultures, task cultures and person cultures. Briefly club culture is indicative of centralised control and power, often via a single leader supported by a powerful inner group. Role culture is seen as a typical “bureaucracy”, where the focus is on procedures, performance and role bound behaviour. This culture can be problematic in times of change. Task cultures focus on team work and problem solving. Person culture is the least common of all even though many of the staff may be attracted to elements of it. Within this culture individualism is prevalent and the organisation is seen as serving personal needs. Bush (1995) suggests the best way to tell an organisation’s nature is to ask five questions:

1. *Who sets the goals?*
2. *How are decisions made?*
3. *What is the stated and real organisational structure?*
4. *How are links to the environment managed?*
5. *What are the messages about management style?*

#### **1.14 Moving Cultures**

According to Law and Glover (2000), “cultures are dynamic, not static the concept of “moving cultures” builds on an analysis of what already exists, a vision of what might be achieved and the associated strategies, which might help to move cultures and achieve

organisational change.” Where these cultures exist there are clear messages to staff and pupils about what is valued, the type of behaviour required for effective teaching and learning. In moving cultures, student participation is very high, relationships between staff and pupils are friendly, there is mutual respect and a climate is orderly, safe and conducive to learning. There are three distinct features of schools with moving cultures. Firstly information about the performance of the school is shared by all the staff, secondly mistakes are looked upon as opportunities to learn. Thirdly there is a great importance given to a team approach to solving problems.

### **1.15 In Praise of Collaboration**

The culture of most second level Irish schools is one that traditionally regarded the principal as the main decision maker, with subject teachers working in their classrooms in isolation from their colleagues, experiencing little or no collaboration. The challenge presented to this structure by developing collaborative structures is significant and evident from research. Starrat (1995) notes that “ when individual teachers who feel empowered work together to respond to the schools needs, the empowerment is qualitatively raised to a new strength.” Fullan (1993) is of the opinion “ there is a ceiling effect to how much we can learn if we keep to ourselves ..... the ability to collaborate is becoming one of the core requisites of post-modern society.” Jenkins (1991) states that “teams, not individuals become the heroes and are supported, not directed by senior management, there by turning the hierarchy upside-down.” Within this type of management the teachers feel empowered and are committed and enthusiastic in the every day activities within the school,

which they believe are leading to agreed mission, vision, values and goals. Whildman and Niles (1987) inform us that “ Collaborative structures enable teachers to test out their own ideas and to expand their expertise by allowing them to hear the ideas of others.” Eastwood and Louis (1992) remind us that “ creating a collaborative environment has been described as the single most important factor for school improvement and the first order of business for those seeking to enhance school effectiveness.” Eisner (1985) reminds us that “ Schools are designed both physically and organisationally to restrict teacher access to other fellow teacher professionals.” Teachers need to experience more collegueship in the context of their classrooms. A quality learning environment in schools is determined by the nature of teacher/teacher, teacher/pupil, teacher/principal and teacher/parent relationships.

Judith Little Warren (1981) informs us that collegiality exists when;

- *Teachers and principals in a school regularly talk about their practice,*
- *Teachers in a school observe each other engaged in the practice of teaching and administration,*
- *Teachers in a school engage in work on the curriculum, designing, researching, evaluating,*
- *Teachers in a school teaching each other what they know about teaching, learning and leading.*

The challenge to educational leaders today is to provide a forum that gives teachers an opportunity to come together to discuss the practical problems and issues of the classroom and school. Today many teachers still operate as independent, autonomous practitioners

who hone their trade in isolation in their classrooms. Collegiality continues to remain literature-bound, a vague, underdeveloped, hypothetical construct and a rare sight in school settings. Students are major beneficiaries when a culture of collegiality blossoms in the classroom.

### **1.16 Change and Leadership**

Gerstner *et al* (1994) refers to the role of the principal as follows;

*Without a competent caring individual in the principal's position, the task of school reform is difficult. Reform can be initiated from outside the school or stimulated from within. But in the end it is the principal who implements and sustains the changes through the inevitable roller coaster of euphoria and setbacks.*

One of the features, which distinguish effective schools, is the quality of their schools. However Fullan (1993 p75) contends that “ Inflated importance of the contemporary principalship is due to the absence of leadership by teachers.” He suggests that “if learning organisations really take hold the principalship as we know it may disappear.” While there may be some merit to the allegation that school reform has suffered because of the excessive demands and overload on principals today, I hold that principalship is as critical as ever in school improvement efforts. The distinguishing characteristic feature of an effective principal is his/her sense of vision or mental picture of a preferred future for the school and his/her ability to translate this vision into meaningful goals which in turn are communicated to the staff, students and community.

The importance of an effective principal in any change process is well established. It is difficult to imagine implementing and sustaining change without strong leadership from a competent principal. Lezotte (1997) informs us that “emerging research on effect schools concludes that “ Effective principals lead from the centre rather than the top.”

Ann Liberman (1995 p9) describes the changing image of the principal as follows;

*“The 1990’s view of leadership calls for principals to act as partners with teachers, involved in a collaborative quest to examine practices and improve schools. Principals are not expected to control teachers but to support them and to create opportunities for them to grow and develop.”*

Dufour and Eaker (1998) state that “principals of professional learning communities lead to share vision rather than through rules and procedures and they make a conscious effort to promote widespread participation in the decision making processes in their schools.” Such principals realise they can not do it alone and that changes are likely to fail unless the staff members feel ownership in the decisions that drive those changes. As Kanter (1995) says “ Change is always a threat when it is done to people, but it is an opportunity when it is done by people.” Effective principals then are people who delegate, develop collaborative decision making processes and step back from being the central problem solver themselves in order to give instead, teachers the responsibility for identifying and solving their own problems. Effective principals then work hard at empowering their teachers and are often described as being very ‘visible’ in their schools. They are frequently seen walking about their schools, especially at break times, so that they know what is going on in their schools.

They are certainly not remote individuals spending most of their time in an office, which is removed from the activities of the school. The effective principal is a major source of incentives who constantly encourages his/her staff and invests in the continuous development of his/her staff by facilitating where possible in service training for them.

Principals must realise that resistance is a natural and understandable human reaction to what people may perceive as disruption. They should welcome and attend to the concerns of teachers who resist change. In this regard Wheelis (1973) writes, “ Since we are what we do, if we want to change what we are, we must begin by changing what we do. So if principals can change what people do, they are providing them with new experiences that can become a catalyst for transforming attitudes.”

Barry Posner and Kouzes (1996) received a consistent response when asking people what they look for in a leader;

*We want leaders who are credible. We must be able to believe in them. We most believe their word can be trusted, that they are personally excited and enthusiastic about the direction we are heading and that they have knowledge and skill to lead. We call this the first law of leadership. “If you don’t believe in the messenger you won’t believe the message” Trust is the glue that holds an organisation together and principals must earn that trust. They must be consistent and predictable and model attitudes, behaviours and commitments that they call on others to demonstrate.*

## **1.17 Conclusion**

Educational change is now an inevitable feature of our society and educational system. The key issue then is how to take this change on board and manage it for the betterment of our young people whom the system is designed to serve. Today's society presents wide-ranging challenges for schools, teachers and the education system as a whole. Teachers are keenly aware that their jobs must change immensely in order to engage today's students in meaningful learning. The purpose of educational change is to help schools attain their goals more effectively by replacing present structures, practices and programmes with better ones. Much of the educational change to date in Ireland has been as Cuban described "first order change." The challenge for teachers and schools is to engage more in second order changes, which effects the culture, structure and teaching practices of schools. The principal has a very important role to play in ensuring effective change takes place and also in enabling teachers to become effective change agents. The clear picture arising from the literature is that change is very much a process, not an event and change in the past has failed due to insufficient attention being given to the phenomenology of change i.e. insufficient time and effort has been given to how change effects the single basic unit, which is the teacher in the classroom. A major strand of change is the culture within the school. Students are major beneficiaries when a culture of collegiality blossoms within the school and the challenge to school leaders is to provide a forum that gives teachers an opportunity to come together to discuss the practical problems and issues of the classroom and school and also to invest in continuous development of their staff by facilitating where possible continuous in-service training for them.

## **Chapter 2. Historical Development of the Transition Year Programme**

## **Chapter 2: Phase One – The Introduction of the Transition Year Project 1974-1986**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter looks at the development of the Transition Year Programme since its inception in 1974. Since then it has gone through three phases of development. Phase 1 was called the Transition Year Project and was in operation from 1974 – 1986. Phase 2 was called the Transition Year Option and was in operation from 1986 – 1994. Phase 3 was called the Transition Year Programme and was introduced in 1994 and is still in existence today.

This chapter will examine the philosophy, rationale, and overall aims of the programme which have remained very much the same through out the three phases. The chapter will start by examining the context in which the Transition Year Project was first introduced and then proceed to examine the results of its first evaluation 1979-80. It will then look at the factors influencing its decline in popularity in the 80's. The chapter will then proceed to examine its reintroduction as the Transition Year Option 1986-87 followed by its mainstream in 1994. It will then look at the aims, dissemination, and inservice provision and support of Transition Year Programme, the impact of the Transition Year Programme and what students, teachers, and parents had to say about it. Finally it will look at the evaluations of the programme by the inspectorate of the Department of Education in 1994/1995 and 1998/1999.

## 2.2 Transition Year Project 1974

To understand fully the Transition Year Project (1974) it is necessary to situate it in the context of the social and economic changes that were taking place at that time. Up until the early sixties the Irish Education system could be described as a bi-partite one with two types of second level schools namely secondary schools which were privately controlled and vocational schools which were publicly controlled. In the mid sixties this system came in for increasing criticism in terms of social equality and relevance of its curriculum.

In May 1963 Dr Hillery, then Minister for Education announced that the Government would undertake the building of a new type of school, which would be, called a Comprehensive School. He gave two reasons for this:

*--- The lack of educational facilities in some parts of the country.*

*--- The fact that Secondary and Vocational Schools were being conducted as separate and distinct entities with no connecting link between them.*

These schools were to be co-educational and open to all classes and levels of ability and were to offer a wide curriculum to match the aptitudes of their pupils. In 1966 the first three Comprehensive Schools were opened at Shannon, Carrroe and Cootehill.

It was seen that in an expanding economy, the education system of the time was not meeting the demands of the economy and also the system was seen as reinforcing social class advantage in that for some students particularly those in Vocational Schools their occupational destinations were being prematurely determined. A perceived dysfunction in

*Educational change formed a part of significant change of attitude, which were occurring in Irish society generally. A notable landmark in this was the publication in 1958 of the Government white paper on economic expansion, which led to the first economic programme and changed attitudes to economic and industrial development. Economists were now emphasising education as an economic investment rather than taking the traditional view of education as a consumer service. The returns on investment in education both individually and socially were held to be as high as investment in capital plans. The prosperity of the modern technological society depended on the availability of an educated workforce. Increased economic growth and production in turn allowed for greater financial resources to be applied to education an expanding economy allows for and needs an expanded education system; new emphasis was placed on slogans such as a nations wealth in its people. Further it was felt that a society needs to draw on the full potential of its pool of talent and many commentators remarked that existing educational provision was not facilitating this. A booklet titled 'All Our Children' was published by the Department of Education in 1969. It described the changes in Irish education and the departments hopes for the future as follows: The nation is investing heavily in its children, all these changes are necessary if we are not to attain our most urgent social and educational objective: equality of opportunity. Every child without exception will receive the best possible education suited to his /her individual talents. We are in a hurry to bring this about. Indeed in the past few years we have gone a long way towards doing so. Already we can claim that wider educational opportunities are open to more of our children than ever before in our history.*

### 2.3 The Transition Year Pilot (1974) –Phase 1

The Transition Year Option was introduced as a pilot scheme in 1974. It was put forward by Richard Burke T.D., the then Minister for Education, as a year out from the normal school course. He suggested that the existing curriculum at the time with its high emphasis on academic achievement was nothing more than “an academic tread mill” and that schools “were losing contact with life outside”. He believed that students needed time to assess who they were and where they fitted into their community and society. They needed to assess their abilities and weakness in absence of exam pressure. He proposed that any schools interested in setting up such a programme should write to him. Three schools replied in the first year with a total of sixty-six students between the three schools. According to the Department of Education 1974/ 75, the three schools which took part in the first year were:

- 1) St. Joseph’s College Garbally Ballinasloe,
- 2) The Model Technical Institute Limerick,
- 3) Sallynoggin Comprehensive school Dublin.

These schools represented the first phase of the pilot Transition Year Programme and over the next few years the number of participating schools grew. By 1977/78 sixty schools were participating with a total of 468 students.

The programme is referred to in the 1976 edition of ‘Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools’, where it says the content will include elements from the following: *Social Education, moral Education, Education for living (including home crafts and*

*education for parenthood, employment and leisure), Philosophy and applied logic, music and arts, Irish studies, European Languages, Visual education, media education and communication skills.*

The shapers of the Transition Year Programme at the time were of the opinion there was undue emphasis on examination performance, an over emphasis on academic achievements. It was hoped the Transition Year Project could go a long way towards redressing this in-balance in the educational system by putting emphasis on cultivating social competencies and personal development. According to the Department of Education 1976/77, it was designed to meet the needs of:

- a) Those for whom Transition Year would represent the end of a formal, full-time schooling.*
- b) Those who intended to follow approved courses for recognised senior pupils.*

#### **2.4 Reports from Initial Participating Schools**

In a newspaper article in 'The secondary teacher' Fr. Kevin Kyle (1977) of Garbally Park Secondary School one of the first three in the pilot scheme reports on the Transition Year Programme. He commented that despite no support from the Department they had continued to offer a Transition Year in their school. He further refers to the schools as educational "pressure cookers" suggesting that Transition Year is a chance to take "the lid of the pressure cooker". Kyle (1977) questioned the content of the curriculum and the way adolescents were led to believe the most important thing when they leave school was to get a job then leaving the 'quality of the human being' up to chance. He says mostly

the year is a less pressurised atmosphere with freedom to ask basic questions, like Who am I? What am I about? How do I relate to other human beings in my environment?

In another article the same year, John Byrne (1977) the co-ordinator of Manor House secondary school describes his first year with the programme as follows: although they had envisaged disorder and lack of motivation within the 20 students who opted for the extra year, they were in the end pleased with results of the year from his observations the students in Transition Year seemed to be most content with the subjects they were learning and the Transition Year room was the most brightly decorated room in the school. John Harris (1982) of Newpark Comprehensive school Dublin conducted a case study survey of the Transition Year course in his school and concluded that student's attitude towards their future and the world of work had matured and become more realistic.

## **2.5 Evaluation of Transition Year Project 1979/80**

In 1979/80 Egan and O'Reilly produced an evaluation of the Transition Year Project. Parent's, teacher's, student's perceptions of the project for the period 1976-1979 were sought from 19 schools. The results of the evaluation were very positive. We found that students attributed to it a wide range of good affects, they claimed to have become more aware of themselves and others, more confident in social settings, more informed about the world outside and surer about the careers they might like to follow. It was also claimed that some benefits accrued to the school as an organisation. It demonstrated the

need for team – teaching in certain subject areas and not least it introduced the school to the experience of educational innovation. The results were favourable about its potential for enhancing student's self-confidence, student/teacher relationships and student/student relationships. Egan and O'Reilly (1980) also report that although their evaluation of Transition Year Project was a positive endorsement for widescale use of it throughout schools in Ireland it was still perceived as being in a pilot project. Egan and O'Reilly (1980) deemed the project to be a success according to the criteria set out by the evaluators. It was recommended that the pilot stage be terminated and the programme should be offered to other interested schools. No action was taken by the Department of Education and no additional schools were allowed to offer the programme. As a result the number of schools offering the programme dropped to 11 in the school year 1982/83. Financial aid for the programme was dropped in 1983. The programme was reintroduced in 1986/87 with guidelines produced by the curriculum and examinations board. The C.E.B was reconstituted as the National Council for Curriculum Association in 1987 and the Department of Education published new guidelines.

## **2.6 Factors Influencing the Decline in Popularity of T.Y.P. in the Early Eighties**

Despite the favourable reports from the Egan and O'Reilly evaluation 1980, the popularity of the programme dropped in 1982 and again in 1983. There were many reasons for this decline:

- 1) The small financial aid, which was £1000 at the time, was withdrawn in 1983 and approval was not open to any new schools who wanted to partake. In the tight budgetary

constraints and the scarce resources available during the early 1980's as outlined in the National Economic Plan, The Way Forward (1983- 87).

2) The implementation of the project both at national level and school level was poor. Minister Burke having announced the initiative left it to a small number of schools with guidance from inspector Sean Mc Carthy to develop programmes that could be circulated to other schools. All the schools involved convened at a conference in July 1974 and thereafter it was up to the schools to operate their own programmes. In the schools there was an absence of a whole – school approach. Designing implementing and evaluating a new programme was unexplored territory for many of the schools at the time. All this coupled with the lack of in-service training for teachers and guidelines for assessing the programme. Lack of time for planning and developing new materials and teaching methods led to frustration in many of the schools.

3) The problem of identity was significant. According to Doyle (1990), “originally Transition Year was intended to serve two kinds of pupil – those whose formal schooling would finish at the end of the year and those who would continue to Senior Cycle, mainly to the Leaving Certificate examination.”

These two traditions were in conflict with one another and created a problem for the identity of the programme. Recognising such differences, Mulcahy (1981) wrote that in a recent survey carried out on the Transition Year programmes showed, “that aspects of those programmes vary from one to the other. Some have a work preparatory element and all have a rather strong cultural and personal development dimension ..... As originally envisaged however these programmes were designed to serve as an aid either for the

purpose of transition from the Junior Cycle to the Senior Cycle ... or for transition from school to work.”

Egan and O'Reilly (1980), “state that of the nineteen schools offering the programme at some stage between 1974 and 1979, fourteen offered the programme as a transition from Junior to Senior Cycle and five offered the programme as a transition to work programme”. The problem of identity was further compounded by the fact that several other programmes involving personal development of pupils and preparing them for working life were also in operation in the late seventies for some of these courses were funded by the EEC.

In April 1977 the Department of Education invited applications from schools interested in running pre-employment courses. According to Hyland and Milne (1992), Guidelines were circulated stating that “the general aim of these courses is that of bridging the gap between the values and experiences normally part of traditional education and those current in the adult world of work.”

According to Leonard (1990), “In the first year of the course eighty Vocational schools participated with enrolments of 1,800 students. Between 1977 and 1983 the number of young people taking the course doubled.”

When we compare those figures with the corresponding figures for Transition Year in that period, it is clear the Transition Year Programme had an identity problem.

#### 4) Changes in Education Ministry

We had seven different ministers of Education in the period 1974 –1982:

R. Burke F.G (1974 – 1976)

P. Barry F.G (1976 – July 1977)

J. Wilson F.F (July 1977 – June 1981)

J. Boland F.G (July 1981 – March 1982)

M. O' Donoghue F.F (March 1982 – Oct 1982)

C. Haughey F.F (Oct 6<sup>th</sup> 1982 – Oct 27<sup>th</sup> 1982)

G. Brady F.F (Oct 27<sup>th</sup> 1982 – Dec 1982).

Different Governments and different Ministers meant there was a lack of continuity and consistency in policy. A project such as the Transition Year Project suffered as a result of this instability.

## **2.7 The Reintroduction of Transition Year in 1986/87 - Phase Two**

In the eighties Ireland's economic situation changed fundamentally. The economy went into recession from 1980 to 1985. Unemployment went from 8% to 19%. It was in this context of increased failure of Senior Cycle schools to lead to employment that the shortcomings of the existing academic style curriculum became increasingly obvious. As the number of jobs available to school leavers decreased dramatically, the curriculum began to be seen as increasingly irrelevant to the immediate and future needs of many of our students. The importance of qualifications in order to get employment grew. Second

level schooling was perceived as not delivering an occupational opportunity. It was into this social and educational climate that the Transition Year was to be reintroduced.

Against the background of economic crisis and rising unemployment, the Minister of Education Gemma Hussey set up C.E.B in 1984. In the same year, the Minister for Education published the consultative document *Ages for Learning* (1984) which proposed a number of options for pupils to spend six years in school. In October 1985 the Government decided that schools could introduce a Transition Year in the school year 1986/87. In 1986 the C.E.B published its second interim report *In our schools* (1986) in which it outlined the future direction of education change.

Gemma Hussey the then Minister for Education proposed in her *Programme for Action* 1984 – 87 that the Department, in consultation with the C.E.B, would adopt a flexibility in its rules governing granting schools the necessary authority to introduce alternative curricula.

According to Crookes and Mc Keirnan (1984 p129), *the C.E.B. had been set up earlier the same year on an interim basis and included in its frame of reference was the following:*

*The initiation of a review of the Leaving Certificate as a measure of general education and a consideration on how it could be broadened in scope and in the range of skills and qualities measured or whether it could be replaced by an alternative assessment system.*

*Also the formation of proposals for alternative senior cycle programmes including programmes geared to preparation for work and those incorporating work experience and / or work simulation.*

The C.E.B's first publication was a consultative document entitled 'Issues and Structures in Education', published in 1984. Two years later it published another document entitled '*In Our Schools*', in which they recommended to the Minister that "Transition Year Options and V.P.T. courses should be developed and also that Transition Year Options and V.P.T. courses could provide major opportunities for schools to innovate at senior cycle." Implementation of the Transition Year Option began in 1985 with a Department Circular M85/85 which was circulated to principals of all post primary schools informing them that all school could offer a six year cycle programme, three years at junior level and three years at senior level. Minister Hussey in this regard was interested in removing the unfairness of some schools having access to a five-year post primary cycle while others operated a six-year post primary cycle. It was an attempt to level the playing pitch.

However the development of the Transition Year Option was to be on a phased basis and controlled by the Department of Education. The cautious approach is evident from the '*Ages for Learning*' (1985) document produced by the Department where it stated, "it is essentially difficult to forecast the extent to which schools will opt to introduce Transition Year. Development will only occur on a phased basis and be under the control of the Department. It is not intended that schools will introduce the course before the 1986/87 school year at the earliest."

During 1985 the numbers participating in Transition Year Options went up to 2,918 in 73 schools. Furthermore the Department and C.E.B. issued guidelines for the course in 1986 which stated the broad aims of the programme. It was described as a one year inter disciplinary course situated between the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate which provided for a broader education for students (C.E.B. 1986). The Transition Year was also to offer a broader perspective and a unique opportunity for students to get off one-year period and give themselves time to grow and mature as people. This curriculum covered a vast array of alternative subjects and activities designed to provide students with a chance to expose their interests both personally and vocationally.

The C.E.B. (1986) guidelines described the rationale for the year as:

*Facilitating the integrated development of the intellectual, emotional, spiritual, physical, social, and vocational capacities of each individual student through structured learning experiences. Its general aim was to prepare young people for their role as autonomous, participative and responsible members of society. In particular it aimed to supply young people with the skills and supports necessary to support their own individual talents, aptitudes, and abilities with regard to the future educational and / or vocational participation. To understand their own particular emotional/ or vocational needs. To develop those skills and competencies necessary to cope successfully with their particular stages of development.*

During 1987 a circular letter (M 39/87) was issued from the Department of Education which stated that only schools currently providing the Transition Year Option would be

given sanction to continue to offer it. In 1987 there was a change of Government and Minister Mary O'Rourke replaced Minister Hussey. Due to the state of economy and Government cut – backs, the decision to offer a three-year Leaving Certificate was reserved by Minister Mary O'Rourke. In 1987 Minister O'Rourke disbanded the C.E.B and replaced it with the N.C.C.A (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment). According to the Minister, the Transition Year Option would now only to be available to Junior Cycle students of the same school in order to stem the flow of transfer of students to schools offering the Transition Year Programme (Department of Education 1987). A two-year senior cycle was stressed and all programmes were required to confirm to the 1978/88 guidelines. Despite all their obstacles, the number of students participating grew over the next five years and by 1992 8,193 students were participating in the Transition Year Option.

Doyle (1990) states that the “perseverance to provide a Transition Year Option despite all the obstacles was “testimony to the creativity, professionalism and educational vision of teachers and principals whose hard work and enthusiasm helped to initiate the first pilot projects.”

## **2.8 Factors Affecting the Completion of the Programme in 1983/93**

Factors affecting the completion of the programme had much in common with the experiences of the programme in the 1970's. A guarded approach was adopted by the Department of Education when it came to implementing the programme in schools.

Guidelines were issued and permission to offer the programme was given to schools on a controlled basis. Lack of Department of Education support, refusal to supply extra staff, lack of planning time, were clearly factors which affected the implementation of the programme.

The job of co-ordinator was seen as an extremely time consuming one. There was no decrease in teaching hours and no financial allowances for co-ordinators at the time. In-service was inadequate. The financial implications of the Transition Year Option were seen to be more important than its educational value.

The 1980's brought a recession and high unemployment, the importance of an academic curriculum and good exam results persisted. In addition there was a wide choice of similar social and development type programmes competing with the Transition Year Option Programme. There was huge competition for places at Third-Level Institutions and principals were under increasing pressure to replace the Transition Year Option with a repeat Leaving Certificate. The Department of Education's *Notes for Schools* (1987) bluntly stated that, "approval of programmes by the Department of Education was to be granted on the understanding that no additional accommodation, equipment, or staff over and above the standard pupil/teacher ratio would be required".

The fact that there was no formal evaluation of the programme by the Department brought into question the status of the programme in the minds of many parents. Parents became increasingly concerned that the Transition Year Option could be a wasted year

and its image as a 'doss year' was gaining momentum. Many parents also felt that their sons/daughters would lose their study momentum and therefore fail to get the required number of points for courses of their choice at third level. Another inhibiting factor in implementing the Transition Year Option was the late notice of approval by the Department of Education. This approval reached the schools only in June/July 1986. Timetables had already been drawn up and it was too late to get vital information to both parents and pupils.

## **2.9 Transition Year Programme – Phase 3**

The nineties are seen as a time of unprecedented change and reform in Irish Education. In 1964 when the 'Investment in Education' team analysed data relating to participation in post – primary education, there was a total of just over 25,000 pupils attending senior cycle education (O.E.C.D/Department of Education 1966). Thirty years later the figure had soared to over 157,000, a six – fold increase (Department of Education 1993/94). This increase in enrolment at senior cycle is largely a result of increased participation rates. In 1964 it was estimated that only 44% of all pupils completed the Junior Cycle while in 1994 about 75% of all second level students completed the Senior Cycle. The Government set a target of 90% completion rate for the Senior Cycle post – primary education by year 2000 Department of Education (1995). The implications of this were enormous and brought about much discussion in relation to the Senior Cycle in the late eighties and the early nineties. Regarding the unsuitability of the traditional Leaving Certificate for a significant proportion of Senior Cycle students, the O.E.C.D's report in

1991, *'Education and Economy in a Changing Society'* states that, "a high quantity of basic education is an essential prerequisite for a vocationally skilled and adaptable labour force." The Green Paper (1992) states "*Clarification of industry's priorities in relation to second level education is contained in a recent confederation of Irish Industry report survey which emphasised the importance of oral and written communication skills, numbering and foreign language skills together with problem solving skills, enterprise initiative and creativity. The need to enhance the quality of preparation for work environment was seen as vital*".

Two curriculum's used by Minister Brennan the then Minister for Education in 1993 adopting the approach advised by the N.C.C.A (M.31/93 and M47/93) indicated that the Minister had taken a decision to restructure the Senior Cycle along the lines recommended by the N.C.C.A. Gleeson and Granville (1996) have described this decision as "a major and decisive step in the relatively short history of curriculum and development in Ireland". Circular M31/93 and subsequent information booklets and video issued by the Department of Education clarified the direction for senior cycle for the future. This circular stresses also that a three-year Leaving Certificate programme will not be permitted. Granville (1996) states,

*The curricular changes at senior cycle can be characterised by three distinctive objectives:*

*Holistic development of young people through for example the development of autonomous learning of activity – based learning and of creativity and enterprise. Educational provision for an increasing diverse range of student aptitude, aspiration and*

*interest and the recognition of a variety of forms of intelligence and achievement. Provision of Programmes and courses, which respond to the perceived, needs of Irish Society, notably in the area of vocational education, and which, satisfy the requirements of equity and social justice.*

The three-year Senior Cycle was introduced as an option for all second level schools in September 1994. The suite of programmes now available at Senior Cycle includes:

- Transition Year Programme
- Established Leaving Certificate
- Leaving Certificate Applied
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

This new Leaving Certificate structure, all with these separate orientations, provides a coherent framework to broaden the scope of education provision at senior cycle and to facilitate schools in providing appropriate and relevant programmes for all students. Each of the programmes are “ringfenced” in that they are free standing and distinct in terms of definitions of students enrolled and of teaching time and resources allocated. This allows for the propagation and growth of each programme in our case the Transition Year Project.

## **2.10 The Transition Year Programme Goals & Aims**

Department of Education curricular guidelines were provided in 1994 specifying the following overall aims for Transition Year as:

- 1) *Education for maturity with emphasis on personal development, including social awareness and increased social competence.*
- 2) *The promotion of General technical and academic skills with an emphasis on interdisciplinary and self directed learning.*
- 3) *Education through experience of adult and working life as a basis for personal development and maturity.*

The Transition Year then is seen as an opportunity for students to spend an extra year at school where non-academic activities are undertaken with a view to broadening their general knowledge, boosting their self confidence, enhancing their maturity and enabling them to make decisions about their future career in the absence of exam pressure. According to the Department of Education Guidelines (1994/95 p4), the 'mission' of Transition Year Programme is "to promote the personal, social, education and vocational development of pupils and to prepare them for their roles as autonomous, participative and responsible members of society". Circular M47/93 can be described as a landmark publication in the implementation of the Transition Year Programme. It outlined the revised structure and content of the Senior Cycle curricular for September 1995 and subsequent years. It describes the changes at Senior Cycle as designed to provide maximum flexibility in catering for the needs, aptitudes and abilities of pupils and describes the Transition year Programme as being introduced to provide pupils with wider opportunities for personal development. It also stipulates that schools would not be allowed to provide a three-year Leaving Certificate as this would lead to an erosion of the Transition Year Programme.

A further description of the Transition Year Programme occurs in *Senior Cycle options for second level schools* issued by the Department in 1996 in which it outlines the changes at senior cycle. It states:

*One of the aims of the restructured Senior Cycle is to encourage students to continue in full-time education after the compulsory school leaving age by providing a range of programmes suited to their abilities, aptitudes and interests. An important overall objective of the holistic development of all students and to foster a sense of self-esteem, self reliance, and innovation to help them to be involved actively in the social and economic future of society. Students may now spend up to three years in Senior Cycle. A school may decide that some or all of its students follow a Transition Year Programme before a two year Leaving Certificate Programme immediately after Junior Certificate*

This booklet also outlines the following main features of a Transition Year Programme.

- *Short study units (modules)*
- *Cultural and Social Studies*
- *Environmental Studies*
- *Technology*
- *Wider choice of languages*
- *Field Trips*
- *Leisure Programmes*
- *Work Experience*
- *Operation of a Business (Mini Company)*
- *Projects/Assignments rather than traditional homework.*

## **2.11 Dissemination and Support of Transition Year Programme**

As referred to previously M47/93 outlined the revised structure and content of Senior Cycle curriculum for September 1995 and subsequent years. It gave support for implementation of Transition Year Programme. Schools were advised that those wishing to offer the programme in 94/95 should send completed application forms to the Department of Education by December 1993. Schools were cautioned that a condition for applying entailed that the school would participate in the planned in – service programme to be provided by the Department of Education. So it was evident at this stage that the Department were committed to proper in – service training for schools and teachers.

## **2.12 In – Service Provision by the Department**

The Transition Year in-service development programme ran from December 1993 to October 1994 and was based on a training of trainer's model. It was developed and supported by an action group of five experienced teachers in consultation with a team of Department of Education inspectors. It was implemented by sixty-three teacher–trainers /regional co-ordinators who were recruited from schools who had Transition Year Programmes prior to 1994/95. The composition and tasks are outlined by Lewis and Mc Mahon (1996).

Schools were informed that the in–service training would consist of initially a briefing session for the principal and co-ordinator to be followed by half day in-service for the

staff in addition to a full day in-service in other schools. It was to finish up then with a full day in-service for all staff in the autumn term of 1994/95 school year.

### **2.13 Evaluation of Train the Trainers Model to Assess it's Success of In-service**

Lewis and Mc Mahon (1996) did an evaluation of the in-service and commented positively on its outcomes as follows.

- 1) *The overall reaction from schools to the Transition Year Programme was positive.*
- 2) *The Programme was perceived to provided valuable opportunities for the professional development of teachers.*
- 3) *The school-based component was singularly effective in reaching whole staff groups including principals and was widely appreciated in schools.*
- 4) *The non-school based clusters were welcomed by participants for the opportunity they offered to meet and exchange information and ideas with colleagues in other schools.*

In general it would appear that the aims and objectives of the training programme were largely achieved according to the Regional Co-ordinators and Action Group members. In particular the programme helped to clarify the aims and objectives and motivate principals and teachers. Schools from all over the country were approaching the programme with enthusiasm.

## **2.14 Concern Expressed by Trainers**

The trainers expressed the following concerns according to Lewis and Mc Mahon (1996):

- 1) They would have preferred separate days for schools with different levels of experience.*
- 2) In the school clusters, some of the participants had previous experience of Transition Year Project or Option while others were just starting and this made it difficult for Trainers to adapt their presentations.*
- 3) Trainers found they were unable to answer questions on resources, time and money.*
- 4) It was also noted that the Transition Year Programme did not have the same funding or teacher allocation as the VPT Programme.*
- 5) There was concern for the role of the co-ordinator and time allowance for planning.*

However in-service represents only one-step in the implementation process. It was felt there was a need for continuing support on many fronts, new materials, resources extra teachers, planning-time, and further training. The Department of Education responded to those concerns and issued Circular M4/96 in which it stated it would provide £50 per student as a contribution towards planning and co-ordinating the programme in order to ensure students would deserve maximum benefit from the Transition Year Programme.

## **2.15 The Transition Year Support Team.**

The Transition Year Support Team was established in 1995 from the sixty-three original co-ordinators. There was to be fourteen people on the team altogether, four of whom

would be core members and ten other regional co-ordinators. The country was to be divided into eleven regions. The Transition Year support teams main task was to provide on-going support for the design, implementation and evaluation of Transition Year in order to improve the learning experience for all participants. The Support Team was available to:

- Respond to the needs of schools by providing in-course development and support.
- Contribute to the development of appropriate learning materials and systems for the programme.
- Develop exemplar materials and instruments to support schools in this internal evaluation of the programme.
- Publish '*Transition News*'.

The Transition Year Support Team was replaced by the Transition Year Curriculum Support Service in 1998 which consisted of six seconded teachers and a secretary. The Department of Education recognises that continuous development of curricular materials as well as effective in-career service for teachers is essential for the development of Transition Year. It is generally accepted today that this support was a significant contribution to the professional development of all those involved.

#### **2.16 Evaluation of the Transition Year Programme by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education 1994/1995**

*In March 1995, the Inspectorate of the Department of Education undertook the appraisal of the Transition Year Programme in 146 schools throughout the country. The schools*

*were randomly selected from different categories of post primary schools. Two inspectors were assigned to visit each school. The purpose of these visits was to form judgements on the structure, appropriateness and effectiveness of the Transition Year Programme being pursued in each of the schools in question and to report thereon.*

*According to the findings of the Inspectors Evaluation 1994/1995, in relation to Organisation of Content, 89% of schools were following the Department's Guidelines on the Transition Year Programme in a satisfactory manner. 59% of schools had programmes in place, which were considered creditable or better while 30% of the programmes were considered distinctive. 11% of schools did not have an acceptable programme and required improvement. On average in the four other categories, Vision, Teaching and Learning, Assessment and Evaluation, about 55% of schools were regarded as creditable or better while 15% of schools required improvement. Weakest categories overall were those involving Assessment and Evaluation.*

## **2.17 Impact of Transition Year**

In December 1998, the NCCA published its findings on one of the most detailed and comprehensive studies ever undertaken into the examination performances of students in Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations. The study was made considerably more complex by virtue of the fact that some of the students followed a two year Senior Cycle i.e. they did not follow a Transition Year programme while others opted for a three year Senior Cycle taken in the Transition Year Programme. The

comparisons between the two-year cohort and the three-year cohort are of considerable interest to all involved in post-primary education. This study concerns itself only with the contribution of Transition Year to the differences in performances. According to the N.C.C.A. Final Report (1999). The following important facts were revealed:

- 1) *The students who opted for the Transition Year had slightly better Junior Certificate results than the students who did not. In this regard the report stresses that the slightly better results of the Transition Year Group is probably a feature of the over representations of girls and secondary schools rather than a feature of Transition Year candidates per se. In fact a more detailed analysis of the Transition Year Group shows that in disadvantaged schools students who took the Transition Year route had a lower score on their Junior Certificate than those who did not.*
- 2) *The students who availed of Transition Year were more likely to take up a subject ab initio. They were also more likely to opt for higher levels e.g. 17.2% of the students who did not do Transition Year opted for higher levels in English and Mathematics while 38.7% of the students who did Transition Year opted for changes from ordinary to higher levels*
- 3) *It was found that on average the students who did Transition Year got 46 CAO points more than those students who did not do Transition Year experience is a function of a variety of factors including gender of candidate, school type and whether or not the school was designated disadvantaged. When these factors are taken into account advantages associated with Transition Year remain, but are generally less dramatic, averaging at 26 CAO points.*

## **2.18 Evaluation of Transition Year Programme in Schools in 1998/99**

According to Murphy (1999) a series of inspections were carried out in eighteen post-primary schools in the course of the year 1998/99 by the inspectors of the Department of Education. The schools were selected with a view to sampling a variety of school types in different parts of the country. The Transition Year schools visited were in six different counties. Secondary schools, community schools, colleges and vocational schools were all included in the sample. Before visiting the school the principal was telephoned and informed of the inspection. In the school the inspector discussed the Transition Year Programme with the principal, visited a number of Transition Year classes, studied the file of Transition Year Programme documents, including the programme and had a meeting with the co-ordinator and in some cases the supporting team of teachers. Before leaving the school, the inspector reported back to the principal and outlined the strengths of the schools Transition Year Programme and suggested measures for improving it. Following the visit a report on the schools Transition Year Programme was written. This synoptic report highlighted the strengths and suggestions for improvement was later sent to the school.

## **2.19 What did the Pupils say About the Transition Year Programme?**

- *They enjoyed it. They valued the opportunity to be active in a creative way.*
- *They relished the opportunity to develop so many technical and interpersonal skills.*

- *They valued the opportunity given by Transition Year Programme to sample different subjects.*
- *Many pupils appreciated the bonding effects of Transition Year Programme on inter-pupil relationships and on pupil-teacher relationships.*
- *Pupils frequently valued the opportunity provided by Transition year Programme for personal development.*

## **2.20 What did the Teachers say About the Transition Year Programme?**

- *They saw it as an opportunity to be creative and innovative.*
- *They found the Transition Year Programme to be most effective from in-service training.*
- *They found the experience to be very much a case of learning by doing.*

The teachers, who engaged in the Transition Year Programme had to devise, develop resource and access their own teaching programmes. It's not surprising that some of the most dynamic teachers in the school are heavily involved in the Transition Year Programme.

## **2.21 The Transition Year Programme and the School**

These were two major arguments in favour of making the Transition Year Programme Compulsory.

- 1) It achieves an economic of scale.
- 2) It overcomes the off-encountered difficulty of pupils who would like to do the Transition Year Programme but who decide not to do it because their friends did not wish to do it.

Whether it was compulsory or optional it was evident those pupils in the Programme played a very significant role in general school activities.

## **2.22 What had the Parents to Say?**

Parents attitude to the Programme seemed to undergo a significant transformation in the course of the year during which their children were doing the Transition Year Programme. Many of them tended to be quite sceptical about the Transition Year Programme before the year began. By the end of the year they were much more positive about the benefits. The change in traditional homework patterns and the perception of parent's that 'the schools role should be exclusively academic' are two of the factors contributing to some parent's prejudiced view of the Transition Year Programme. The experience of seeing their children mature through their Transition Year Programme experiences does much to alter their original perceptions. Needless to say, if the pupils do not commit themselves to the Transition Year Programme and a number don't, their parent's are quite justified in questioning its value for their children.

### **2.23 The Benefits of Having a Transition Year Curriculum Support Service**

The new six-person support team, co-ordinated by Gerry Jeffers was based in Blackrock Education Centre in order to service the Transition Year Programme. It is seen to be as essential to the Transition Year Programme as textbooks are to a mainstream curriculum subject. The Support Team develops new teaching resources, holds regular workshops for co-ordinators and teachers, publishes a much-appreciated Transition Year newsletter and advises teachers and co-ordinators. The benefits of their input is to be seen in the highly developed professionalism that exists among the Transition Year co-ordinators and teachers in schools. It can be seen in the very sophisticated teaching programmes that many of the teachers have developed. It was also to be seen in the innovative approaches that teachers have developed to pupil assessment and programme evaluation.

### **2.24 Conclusions of the Evaluation**

- *The Transition Year Programme is attaining the overall aims of the programme in all schools.*
- *In all schools the teaching in the Transition Year Programme is based on experimental learning strategies.*
- *In all schools the co-ordinator showed a high level of commitment.*
- *A printed programme was available in each of the eighteen schools.*
- *In the majority of schools there is a through and well thought out procedure for providing information to parents and pupils on the Transition Year Programme.*

- *In all schools there was a graduation evening for Transition Year pupils. Parents are normally invited to these evenings. There is a display of pupil's work and the pupils are presented with a Transition Year Programme Certificate and Certificates for a number of the practical modules in which they have been successful.*
- *In the majority of schools, assessment in the Transition Year Programme is more developed and varied than in discrete subjects.*

## **2.25 A Transition Year Survey (1999) into Second Level Students Perception Of the Points System**

Transition Year students in sixty-four different schools were invited by the Transition Year Support Team to engage in a process of surveying, analysing and reporting on the perceptions of their sixth year students of the current points system. According to the Commission on the Point System (1999), the purpose of the survey was:

- 1) *To provide students perspectives, particularly those currently following the Leaving Certificate Programmes on the points system for inclusion in the deliberation of the Commission on the points system.*
- 2) *To provide an educational experience for Transition Year students that would heighten their awareness of the points system and the democratic process, enhance and develop their research skills. The Transition year Support Team saw the value of the survey as:*
  - *Providing a special opportunity for those students presently affected by the points system to have their voices heard by Commission.*

- *Providing students with the opportunity to participate actively in the democratic decision making process at National level.*
- *Heightened awareness among Transition Year students about the operation of the points system.*
- *Developing Transition Year student's critical thinking skills.*
- *Developing new skills about data collection and research.*
- *Assisting students in making more informed decisions with regard to their own education.*

As can be seen even through it was the perception of sixth year students that was under discussion in the report the Transition Year students were key players in the process and would learn from the experience they would develop research skills such as questionnaire design skills, coding, analysis, synthesis and report – writing. The work would enhance their understanding of the points system and increase their social awareness through participation in the democratic process. The Transition Year students distributed the questionnaire to their Leaving Certificate students, explained the purpose of the survey and the nature of the questionnaire. As a learning experience in promoting independent learning to work together as a team.

## **2.26 Results of Survey:**

The results of the survey clearly showed that students have strong opinions about the points system. The findings highlight the *“tension and clash of values between what*

*Transition Year promotes and what the points system seems to value. For example it was felt that Transition Year promotes maturity, independent research and learning, exploration of ideas, initiative, teamwork, skills development, the ability to make judgements about the own work and the extension of the learning environment beyond the classroom, where as, the Leaving Certificate puts emphasis on individual competitiveness, knowledge, retention and recall as opposed to building on the educational experiences on the Transition Year. Just as the Transition Year builds on the Junior cycle the Leaving Certificate should follow on developmentally from the Transition Year".* According to the Points Commission (1999), the student's causes of dissatisfaction centre around the following areas;

- *The system is not perceived to reward all students equally; it rewards specific skills and knowledge while ignoring others.*
- *It measures a narrow range of experiences and educational achievements.*
- *It is not perceived as selecting the best or most suited students for courses.*
- *It is not perceived as giving all the students an equal chance of securing a place in Third Level Education.*
- *Unnecessary stress and tension seem to be caused at least in part by the emphasis on performance in one examination and by the fact that there are insufficient places available in Third Level Colleges.*
- *There is an uncertainty among students about the extent to which some of the basics of our education system, writing and problem solving are rewarded.*

While the students acknowledged that the system encouraged them to work hard, they also recognised that it promoted competitiveness and individualism and it did not reward teamwork or good interpersonal skills.

According to the Points Commission (1999) “ *the greatest challenge is to develop a system which values in theory and practice a much broader range of educational aims with an in-built comprehensive assessment system*”.

### **2.27 Summary**

In the mid sixties the system of education in Ireland came in for increasing criticism in terms of social equality and relevance of its curriculum. Comprehensive Schools were introduced in May 1963 by the then Minister of Education, Dr. P Hillery. These were to be co-educational and open to all classes and levels of ability and were to offer a wide curriculum to match the aptitudes of their pupils. In the mid sixties a perceived dysfunction in the relationship between the economy and schooling was all too evident. It was felt that economic prosperity depended on an educated work force. This led to the introduction of the Transition Year Project and assessment of curricula in general. The Transition Year Project was introduced in 1974 by the then Minister of Education, R. Burke T.D. He said students needed time to assess who they were and where they fitted into their community and society. They needed to assess their abilities and weaknesses in the absence of exam pressure.

In 1979/80 Egan and O'Reilly produced an evaluation of the Transition Year Project. Parents, teachers, and student's perceptions were sought from nineteen schools. The

results of this evaluation were very positive. Student's claimed to have become more aware of themselves and others, more confident in social settings, more informed about the world outside and the careers they would like to follow. It was recommended to terminate the pilot stage and to offer the Transition Year Option to interested schools. However no action was taken by the Department and no additional schools were allowed to offer the programmes because of the economic climate at the time. As a result the number of schools offering the programme dropped to eleven in 1982 and in 1983 financial aid was dropped. The Transition Year Option was reintroduced in 1986/87 with guidelines produced by the C.E.B. The Transition Year Option was introduced against a background of economic crisis and rising unemployment. However when it came to implementing the programme, a guarded approach was adopted by the Department of Education. Permission to offer the course was on a controlled basis. There was a lack of support from the Department of Education and a refusal to supply extra staff or allow extra time for planning. In addition there was a wide choice of similar social and development type programmes competing with the Transition Year Option.

Along came the nineties, which were seen as a time of unprecedented change and reform in Irish education. The Senior Cycle (1994) programme was re-structured in order to broaden the scope of education provision at Senior Cycle and to facilitate schools in providing appropriate and relevant programmes for all students. The Transition Year Programme was to provide students with wider opportunities for personal development. This time financial support and in-service training was provided by the Department. A Transition Year Support Team, which was made up of fourteen members, was established

in 1995. The Transition Year Support Team was replaced by the Transition Year Curriculum Support Service in 1998 which was made up of a team of six seconded teachers and a secretary. In 1994/95 the Transition Year Programme was evaluated by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education. In 1998/99 a second evaluation of the Transition Year Programme was carried out by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education, which concluded that all the schools surveyed were attaining the overall aims of the programme.

## **Chapter 3: The Research Methodology and Rationale**

## **Chapter 3 The Research Methodology and Rationale**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This section explores the rationale for undertaking the research. It outlines the aims of the research and explains the mode of research employed in meeting those aims. The methodology used in collecting the preliminary information and in undertaking the research is outlined. Finally the reliability and validity of the research is discussed.

### **3.2 Rationale for the study**

The author has chosen this topic because having been involved with the Transition Year Programme as a teacher for the past seven years and having been a Transition Year - Year Head he views it as an innovation with far reaching implications both for students and those in leadership positions in schools including principals, co-ordinators and whole staff. The author is therefore familiar with the literature on Transition Year and is familiar with discussing various aspects of Transition Year with his colleagues. He is searching for answers challenging questions about how the programme could be improved and developed further in the light of the aims and *Guidelines for Schools* as laid down by the Department of Education 1993 in its booklet titled *Transition Year Programmes*. The author considers the Transition Year Programme to be a curricular development which is different from other curricular changes in the past. Transition Year is not an imposed curricular change; schools opt to offer the Transition Year Programme. The Programme is not centrally prescribed or subject to a terminal examination. The school has the power to design a programme that suits the needs of its students. Transition Year is viewed

therefore as a distinct programme in its own right. With this in mind the author was curious to investigate the programme in six different schools in his locality. The author is of the opinion that the Transition Year Programme offers an opportunity for genuine school development within an individual school and this has implications for leadership at principal, co-ordinator, teacher, and whole staff levels.

The author views the Transition Year Programme as an innovation which facilitates the holistic development of all students progressing to the end of senior cycle. He views the programme as an opportunity to help students acquire knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes needed for citizenship in today's society without the pressures of an end year exam. Having analysed the data the author hopes to be able to pass on some rich guidance and advice to his colleagues and staff as a whole and also to anyone else to whom the study may be of interest. It is hoped that the analysed data will add to existing knowledge and help further the development of the Transition Year Programme. In this regard it is felt the research is both timely and necessary.

### **3.3 Aims and Objectives of Present Study**

The study is an investigative study of the Transition Year Programme in six different schools in my locality. The schools chosen were:

1. A Private Fee Paying Single Sex Boarding School
2. A Community College (Mixed)
3. A Voluntary Secondary School (All girls)
4. A Community School (All girls)

5. A Voluntary Secondary School (All boys)

6. A Post Primary V.E.C. (Mixed)

In the first three schools the Transition Year Programme was compulsory, whilst in the later three the Transition Year Programme was optional.

In broad terms the study will attempt to investigate the Transition Year Programme experiences in each school in the light of the guidelines laid down by the Department of Education (1993). The programme will be investigated from the perspectives of students, teachers, co-ordinators and principals in the different schools in order to get an overall rounded view of the Transition Year Programme as it is today in the above schools.

### **3.4 In relation to students**

A random sample of twenty students was taken from each school and surveyed by questionnaire in order to find out the following information:

1. To what extent Transition Year had given them a) a desire for knowledge, b) assisted them in taking responsibility for their own learning c) enabled them to become more mature, autonomous, participative and responsible members of society.
2. How did they perceive an educational experience such as Transition Year without the pressure of an exam-oriented year? Was it a worthwhile experience? What aspects of the Transition Year appealed a) most to them b) least to them?
3. To what extent did a) changes take place in student/teacher relationships b) changes in teaching methodologies as perceived by the students?

4. To what extent did it enable them to a) make decisions about future careers b) to make informed decisions about possible subject uptake for their Leaving Certificate c) obtain a broad range of skills (e.g. Computers, Art, Photography etc.) d) engage in work experience.
5. Their perceptions on compulsory/optional matters of Transition Year.

### **3.5 In relation to teachers**

Five teachers from each school were surveyed by questionnaires. The teachers were selected from different subject areas e.g. maths/science, English/languages, practical subjects, work experience, PE/personal development. The teachers were surveyed in order to investigate the following.

1. How they were coping with the freedom to design new courses in accordance with the needs of their students.
2. How teachers are coping with the new style of teaching called for in a programme such as Transition Year Programme.
3. The extent to which teachers are involved in planning and decision making in relation to the Transition Year Programme.
4. The satisfactory/unsatisfactory nature of in-service training, and support structures available for teaching the Transition Year Programme.
5. The change if any in relationships between teachers and their students.
6. Other factors such as gender balance and years teaching experience of teachers teaching the Transition Year Programme.

### **3.6 In relation to co-ordinators**

One co-ordinator from each school was surveyed by questionnaire in order to investigate the following:

1. Issues in relation to planning, implementation, in-service, decision-making, and evaluation for further development. To discern if an empowerment process is being widely promoted and supported in a variety of ways.
2. The curricular nature and content of Transition Year Programme in order to establish degrees of difference or similarities in structure and content of the respective programme i.e. are there emerging patterns.
3. The optional/compulsory nature of the programme in an attempt to investigate the overall effect of this on Transition Year.
4. The value of a work experience module in preparing young people for the world of work and adult life.
5. Evaluation of the Transition Year Programme. Who does it? When and why?
6. Other issues such as participation of students, gender of co-ordinators, age profile, post of responsibility, support structures for co-ordinators, facilities available etc.

### **3.7 In relation to principals**

The principals of each school were interviewed and the interviews were recorded on tape.

The interviews will attempt to elicit in broad terms the extent to which the principals in the selected schools are both leaders and managers in relation to successful implementation and daily running of the Transition Year Programme in their schools. To what extent empowerment processes were widely promoted and supported in a variety of

ways. Hand (1995) in his study on the Transition Year Programme informs us that many of the leadership opportunities afforded to principals in relation to the Transition Year Programme have neither been identified nor grasped. Specifically the principals were asked to describe their schools in terms of its educational focus, ethos, and their reasons for offering the programme on a compulsory or optional basis. They were questioned about issues such as the existence of voluntary contributions and where it existed, how the money was spent and who decided how to best spend this money? They were asked to clarify how the Transition Year Programme fits in relation to overall structures within their schools. They were asked to clarify who was involved in decision making processes in relation to Transition Year Programme i.e. curricular content, planning and evaluation and whether teachers were allowed time tabled planning time for discussing issues in relation to the Transition Year Programme. They were questioned on the evaluation of the programme, when did it take place, who was involved and were asked what was the purpose of the evaluation. They were questioned about the involvement if any of parents and their opinions were sought as to what the main factors were which contributed to the overall programme success or failure i.e. to identify strengths and weaknesses of the programme within the individual schools. They were asked to comment on the role of the co-ordinator in particular, and to identify qualities they would expect their respective co-ordinators to have.

### **3.8 The Research Methodology**

Having studied many different approaches and styles of education research in order to get an insight into the different ways of planning the investigation it was ultimately decided

that the case study method would be the most appropriate. In general case studies are the preferred strategy when “how” or “why” questions are being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigation has little or no control (Yin 1994.p.9).

As a research endeavour according to Yin (1983) the case study contributes “uniquely to our knowledge of individual, organizational, social and political phenomena”. The study is about seeking an insight into the Transition Year more so than obtaining statistical analysis. The case study is particularly appropriate for individual researchers because it gives the researcher an opportunity to do a broad study on individuals perceptions of a programme such as the Transition Year Programme with a limited time scale. Case studies are concerned principally with the interaction of factors and events. Its particularly attractive to the Transition Year Programme because of its practical problem solving emphasis where the practitioner carries out the research which is directed towards a greater understanding of and improvement of the innovation under investigation.

Alderman *et al* (1977) describes the case study as “an umbrella term” for a family of research methods having in common the decisions to focus the inquiry around an instance. Judith Bell (1999) says “its much more than a story about or a description of an event or state, evidence is collected systematically, the relationship between the variables is studied and the study is methodically planned”. Nisbet and Watt (1980) point out sometimes it’s only by taking a practical instance that we can obtain a full picture of this interaction. Although observations and interviews are most frequently used in the case study method, questionnaires and interviews only were considered appropriate for this study by the researcher. By using carefully designed questionnaires the researcher was able to collect data in both quantitative and qualitative mode. The constraints of time and

practicality in this instance did not allow the researcher engage in participant observations. The principle purpose of the study was to investigate the Transition Year Programme as its currently being offered in six different schools in the researchers locality, in order to understand and appreciate what's happening in their Transition Year Programme and pass on the findings to fellow teachers and interested parties. This case study was inductive in that it did not begin with a theory and then prove it, but it began with a relevant area of study namely the Transition Year Programme and what was relative to the Transition Year Programme was allowed to emerge.

Judith Bell (1999) informs us "that the great strength of the case study method is that it allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific instance or situation in order to identify the various interactive processes at work". These processes may remain hidden in a large-scale survey but may at the same time be crucial to the success or failure of the implementing and proper running of a programme such as the Transition Year Programme. Every school has its own common and unique feature and management structures. The job of the case study researcher in this instance is to identify these features and to show how they affect the implementation of the Transition Year Programme and the manner in which schools as a whole function in selection to the Transition Year Programme.

Bessey (1981) contends that "if case studies are carried out systematically and critically, if they are aimed at the improvement of Education, if they are relateable and if by publication of the findings they extend the boundaries of existing knowledge, then they are valid forms of educational research". Like all other methods of research the case

study methods have its strengths and weaknesses. Malim and Birch (1997) describe these as follows.

### **3.9 Strengths of the Case Study Method**

- The case study allows detailed study of all aspects of the individual case instead of just being concerned with a few measurable characteristics. There is a greater chance that insights might be gained into the nature of behaviour, which might well be missed in other methods of study.
- Case study is based more upon description and qualitative data than upon measurement. It is less likely therefore to ignore those facets of behavior, which cannot easily be measured.

### **3.10 Weaknesses of the Case Study Method.**

- **Subjectivity:** Because the case study is based upon the analysis of qualitative rather than quantitative data, interpretation is at the hands of the researcher alone. The researcher is responsible for what to include in their descriptions and what to leave out. It is open to the researcher to interpret his findings in a way that does not support his/her theory.
- **Generalization:** It's not easy to generalize the findings due to the changing nature of the Transition Year Programme from school to school.

### **3.11 Obtaining Access and Getting Started**

The research was deliberately scheduled for taking place in October 2001. The research finally got under way in late November 2001 and continued into December 2001. Initial research permission was sought from the principals of their respective schools by letter. This was followed up with a telephone conversation in order to arrange a meeting to explain the aims and objectives of the research. Initially it was intended to involve a fee paying mixed private secondary school in the research. However, unfortunately the principal of that school declined the opportunity on the grounds of his already overloaded busy schedule. Following the initial meeting with the principal a more informative meeting was arranged with the co-ordinator of each school. At this meeting the co-ordinator undertook to take responsibility for circulating the questionnaires to both teachers and students taking part in the survey. It was agreed that the students to be selected would be in fifth year at the time of the survey i.e. they had completed their Transition Year in 2000/2001. It was further agreed that every effort would be made to obtain a sample in which each and every student had an equal chance of being selected to participate. This was done by giving each student a number and then placing all the numbers in a box and withdrawing randomly twenty numbers. Furthermore the students were fully informed of the aims of the study so that they fully understood what they were agreeing to. The students were informed that if they wanted to withdraw from the survey at any time they were free to do so. No pressure was exerted on them to complete the questionnaire. They were also informed that their privacy would be respected. The students were to be reminded of the opportunities within the questionnaire to comment and be critical where they felt the need to do so. They were also given the opportunity to

comment openly about the Transition Year at the end of the questionnaire. Every effort was made to achieve a gender balance and indeed as the results of the research show, this was achieved. The researcher had no previous knowledge of or dealings with either the principal or the co-ordinator but he found both principals and co-ordinators to be accommodating, forthcoming with information and interested in the overall idea of the research. A pilot study indicated that a forty-minute period was more than adequate for completing the questionnaire. The interview with the principal was semi-structured in that the principal was given a list of possible questions that the researcher needed to address. Coen and Manion (1982) are of the opinion that this semi-structured interview is an “open situation having greater flexibility and freedom ----- [and] although the research purpose governs the questions asked, their content, sequence, and wording are entirely in the hands of the interviewer”. This does not mean however that the semi-structured interview is a more casual affair, for in its own way it has to be carefully planned. Having prior knowledge of the questions according to the researcher facilitated a rich and freer response and enabled a rapport and trust to evolve between the interviewer and the interviewee. Meason (1985) informs us that the quality of the data is dependent on the quality of the relationships you build with people being interviewed.

### **3.12 Populations and Samples**

The populations are defined as the group from which the sample was taken. In the present research, three different populations were involved. The first population was all the students in the six chosen schools who did their Transition Year in the year 2000/2001. This amounted to 452 student’s altogether. Twenty students were randomly selected from

each school and questionnaires distributed. Therefore the total expected sample of the students was to be 120. In fact the actual sample yield was 115, this gave a 95.8% return.

The second sample was taken from teachers. The teacher sample, five teachers from each school were requested to fill out questionnaires. This gave the researcher a total sample of 30 teachers. The five teachers per school were selected to represent a cross section of subject disciplines. As a rough guide it was decided to include a teacher from each of the following subject areas where possible. 1) Math's/Science 2) English / languages 3) Any practical subject/ PE 4) Personnel Development/ Work Experience 5) Art/ photography. It was felt that teacher representatives from each of the above areas would yield a sample of teacher's views, which were broadly representative of the teacher population as a whole. There was a 100% response rate from the teacher questionnaire.

The third sample consisted of six co-ordinators, one from each different school. Co-ordinators were surveyed by questionnaire and informal discussion. The principal interviews were last. The principal from each school was interviewed and taped. Again there was 100% response rate from the principals. This enabled the interviewer to validate many of the teacher and co-ordinator responses as well as providing a deeper and independent insight into the roles of teachers and co-ordinators and other important issues relating to planning and in-service provision etc. To achieve this would have been difficult by any other method. It enabled the researcher to home in on certain leadership qualities of principals, teachers and co-ordinators perceived to be necessary for proper implementation and running the Transition Year Programme.

### **3.13 Questionnaire Method of Research**

After much preliminary work by the researcher on planning, consulting, and deciding what exactly the researcher wanted to find out, only then was it decided that the questionnaire would be suitable for the research purpose and likely to yield usable data.

Well designed questionnaires were produced which, it was hoped, would give the information needed and was also be acceptable to the students, teachers, and co-ordinators and which was unlikely to give problems at the analysis and interpretation stage. Much thought was given at the design stage as to how the responses would be analysed and not after all the questionnaires had been returned. The questionnaires for both students and teachers were considered to be a good way of collecting the type of information required for the survey. It was possible to collect the information quickly and cheaply, and questions, which were irrelevant or superfluous to the main task, were eliminated after the pilot stage.

The questions were structured to enable ease of analysis. Care was taken to ensure there was no ambiguity in the wording i.e. to ensure that all questions meant the same thing to different respondents. Every effort was made not to confuse respondents in any way in order to get answers to all questions if at all possible. Leading questions were avoided i.e. questions which would be in danger of leading respondents in one way. Questions, which might provide useless responses, were avoided. It goes without saying that every effort was made to avoid questions that might be considered sensitive e.g. rather than asking

respondents to give their exact age, it was thought better to ask them to indicate the category within which their age lies.

Appearance and layout of the questionnaire was considered to be important in order to appeal to the recipients and encourage them to answer the questions. The questionnaire method was thought to be advantageous in that the purpose of the survey could be explained to the respondents in five to ten minutes. A drawback, however, was that the answers had to be accepted as final as rechecking or collection of questionnaires was not possible due to the anonymity of the respondents and also the constraint of time. An opportunity to supplement the respondents answers by interviewing would have been desired, however due to time constraints again this was not to be.

### **3.14 The Interview Method of Research**

One of the most important sources of case study information is the interview. In this research the interviews were semi-structured in that each principal was given a list of possible questions that in a broad manner the research needed to address. The interviews were casual affairs but in their own way had to be carefully planned and of course the tape recorder provided an accurate rendition of the research. It is the researcher's opinion that having prior knowledge of possible question areas facilitated a rich and freer responses and enabled a rapport and trust to evolve between the researcher and the principals. Measor (1985) informs us that the quality of the data is dependent on the quality of the relationships you build with people being interviewed. Yin (1994) remarks

that “overall interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs. These human affairs should be reported and interpreted through the eyes of specific interviewees and well informed respondents can provide important insights into a situation”. Mason (1996) warns us that “interviewing is not an easy option, it is difficult intellectually, practically, socially, and ethically, it is greedy of resources, heavily consuming of skills, time and effort both in planning and conducting the interviews themselves and in analysing the products”. The interviews in this research were also used to check the accuracy and reliability of certain data obtained from teachers and co-ordinators and students. This allowed the researcher to get a greater depth or to approach certain questions already asked of teachers, co-ordinators and students from a different perspective i.e. that of the principal. To this end then the interviews were in tandem with the questionnaires in order to establish how well they corroborated each other. It allowed comparisons to be made between different types of accounts of the same events and sets of interactions. The researcher felt that this interview method allowed the researcher to get a fairer and fuller representation of the principal’s perspectives. It gave the researcher more control and in all cases the principals were only too ready to cooperate and air their views and with the correct mixture of politeness and curiosity, fruitful responses were had. The researcher succeeded in most cases in getting to the heart of the principal’s opinions.

### **3.15 The Pilot Survey**

Ideally the pilot survey should be of a comparable size to that of the main survey, but in this instance that was not feasible. As a matter of convenience and time the pilot study

was carried out in three different types of schools: A Community College (mixed), an all boys Secondary School and an all girls fee paying Secondary School.

The most valuable functions of those pilot studies were to determine first and foremost the adequacy of the questionnaires and of course if the main survey was worth carrying out as planned. It was a safeguard against the possibility that the research as a whole would be ineffective. In addition the pilot survey enabled the researcher to estimate a suitable time length for the survey, whether some questions were worth asking at all, whether all questions were meaningful to the average student, the ease with which students handled the questionnaire, the adequacy of the questions, if the wording was clear, unambiguous. The pilot study resulted in important improvements to the questionnaire and a general increase in the efficiency of the enquiry.

### **3.16 Reliability and Validity**

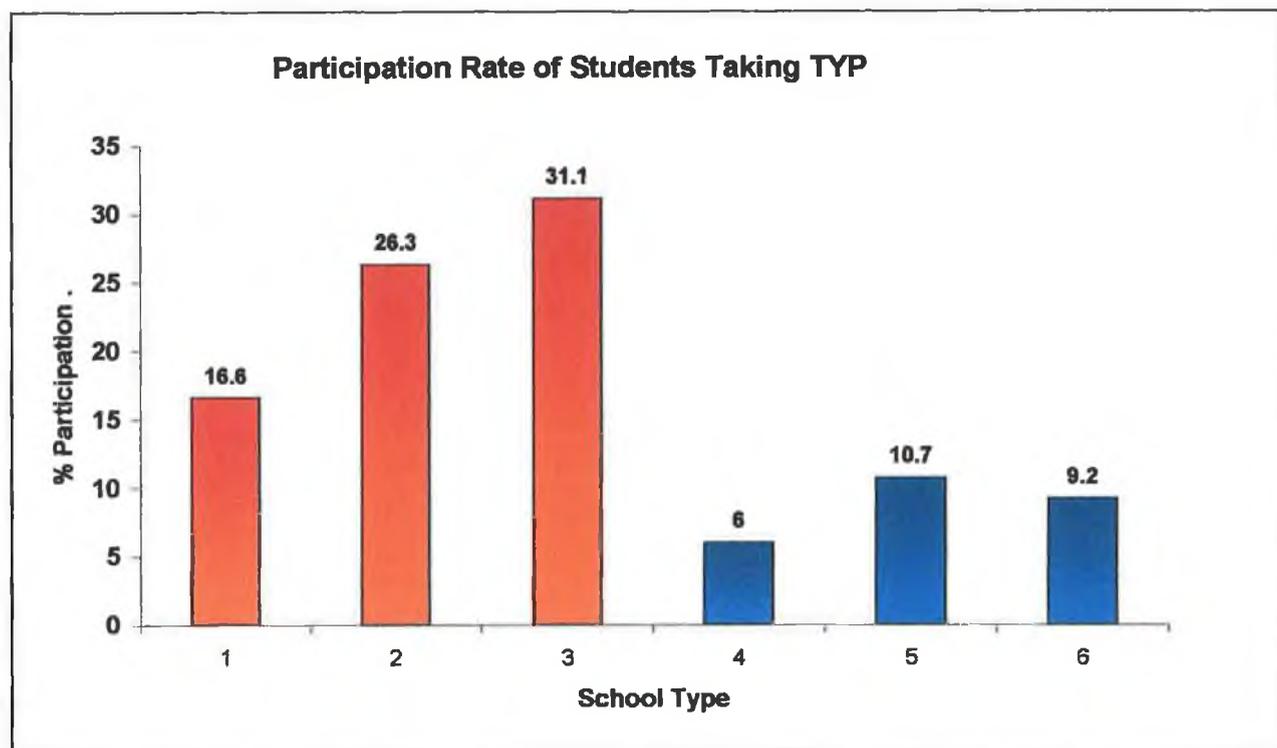
Reliability and validity involves the accuracy of the research methods and techniques. Reliability and validity are different kinds of measures of quality, rigor, and wider research potential and they are achieved according to the methodological principles already outlined in this chapter. Generally speaking they act as a judgement of whether the data analysis measures, explicates or illuminates whatever it claims to measure explicate or illuminate i.e. does the study get at the kinds of issues and concepts outlined in the aims of the study. In the present study the data generated and the analysis has not only been appropriate to the research questions but they have also been thorough, careful, honest and accurate. All the data has been recorded on an SPSS database, which is,

available to justify the steps through which interpretations were made. In the interviews with the principals the principals were informed that both teachers and co-ordinators had been surveyed on various issues relating to planning and implementing the Transition Year. This would have served as a corroboration of information gleaned from principals and no doubt would have acted as a deterrent against likely embellishment. There was remarkable consistency in the responses of principals and co-ordinators in the same schools. This would seem to indicate the responses were real. Interviews with principals were recorded on tape and so can easily be verified. The use of more than one method for collecting data is known as triangulation and is described in the Open University Course E811 as “ Cross checking the existence of certain phenomena and the veracity of individual accounts by gathering data from a number of informants and contrasting one account with another in order to produce as full and balanced a study as possible”. So the logic of this triangulation indicates that one can use different methods or data sources to investigate the same phenomena and in the process can judge the efficacy or validity of different methods and sources by comparing the results.

## **Chapter 4. Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis of the Data**

#### 4.1 Co-ordinator Questionnaire Analysis

Fig. 1.1



#### Key

1 = private secondary fee paying (All Boys)

2 = community college (mixed)

3 = voluntary secondary school (All Girls)

4 = community school (All Girls)

5 = voluntary secondary school (All Boys)

6 = VEC (mixed)

Fig. 1.1 shows the percentage participation rate of the students of each individual school under investigation. The total number of students participating in Transition Year across the six schools was four hundred and fifty two students. As can be seen 74% of the students were in either a Private Secondary Fee paying (All Boys), or Community College (mixed), or Voluntary Secondary School (All Girls), while 26% of the students were in either a

Community School (All Girls), or Voluntary Secondary School (All Boys), or a V.E.C. School (mixed). The reason for the higher participation rates in schools 1, 2, and 3 is because Transition Year in these schools was compulsory for all students, while in schools 4, 5, and 6 Transition Year was optional for all students. The bar chart shows also that 74% of the students are engaged in compulsory Transition Year, while 26% of the students were engaged in optional Transition Year.

**Fig. 1.2**

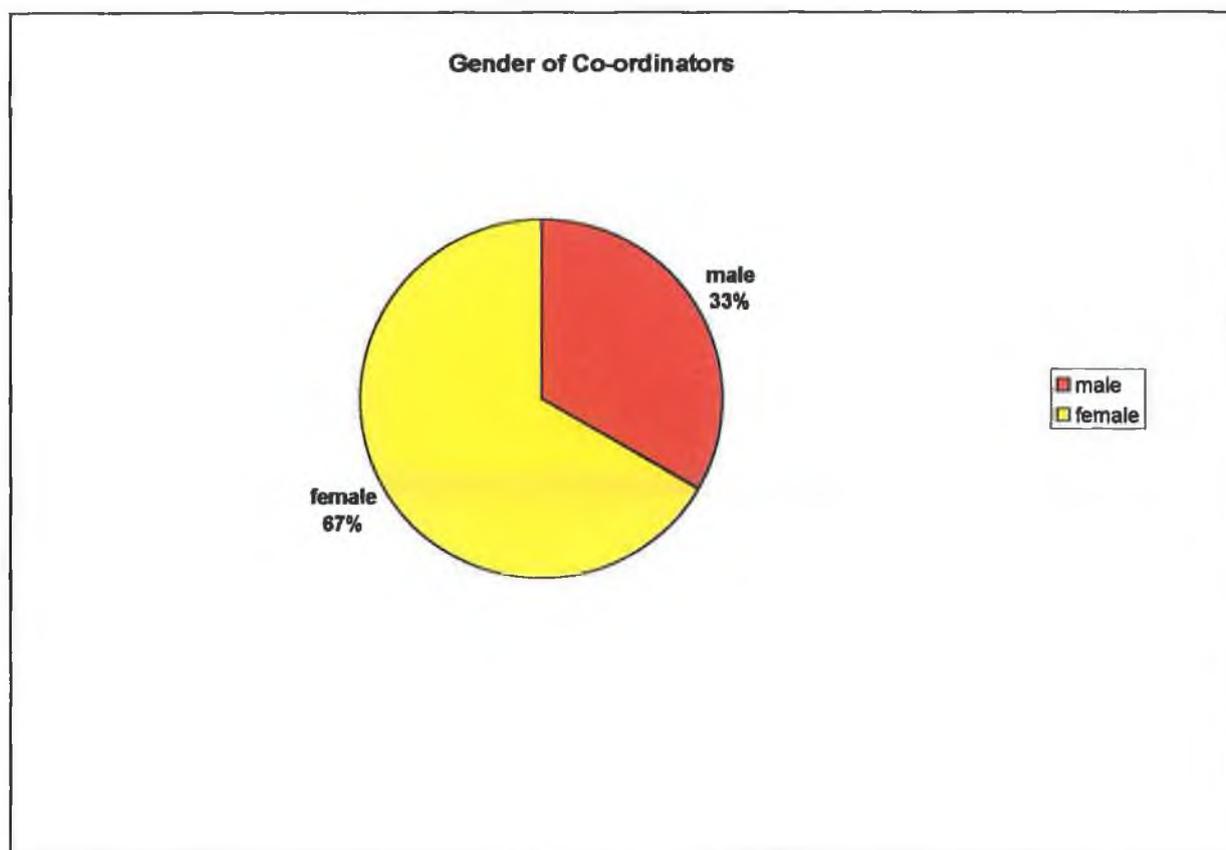
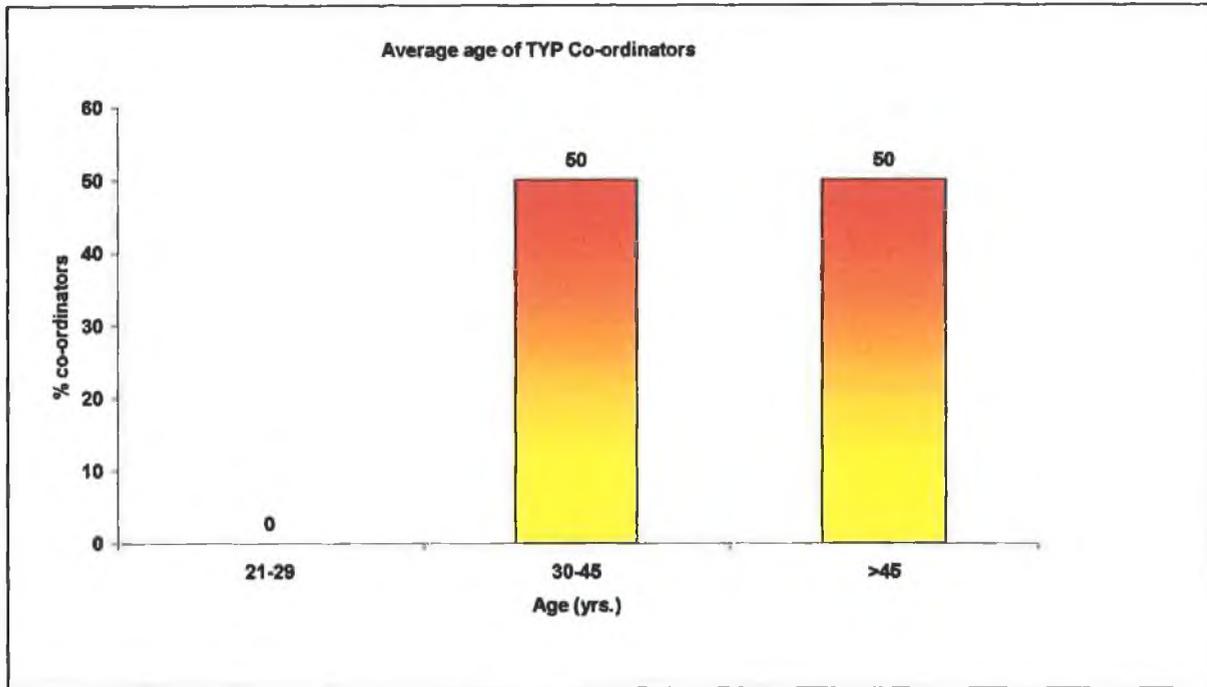


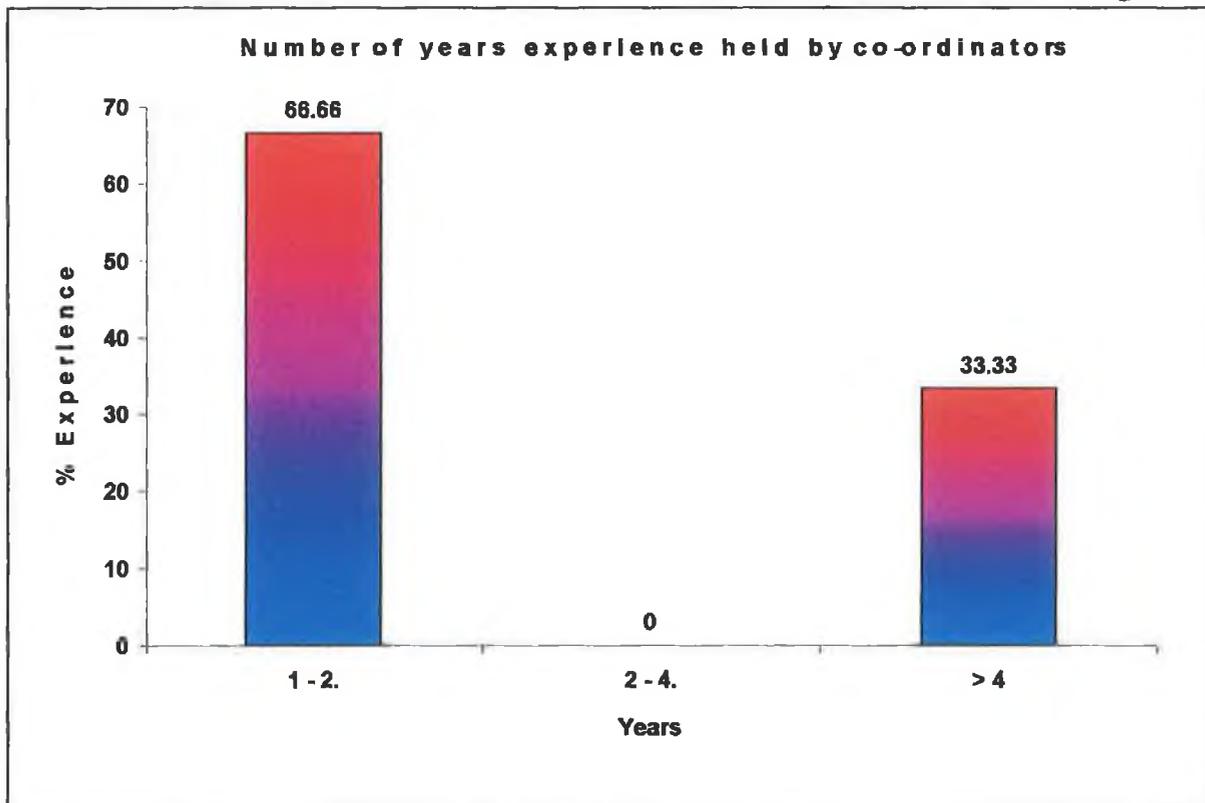
Fig 1.2 shows 67% of the co-ordinators that responded are female and 33% are male. The most recent official figures on the gender breakdown of teachers at second level, figures for 1997-1998 shows that 56% of teachers were female and 44% were male.

**Fig. 1.3**



The bar chart (Fig. 1.3) shows clearly that all co-ordinators are over 30 years of age, reflecting perhaps the perceived rigours and demands of co-ordination.

**Fig. 1.4**



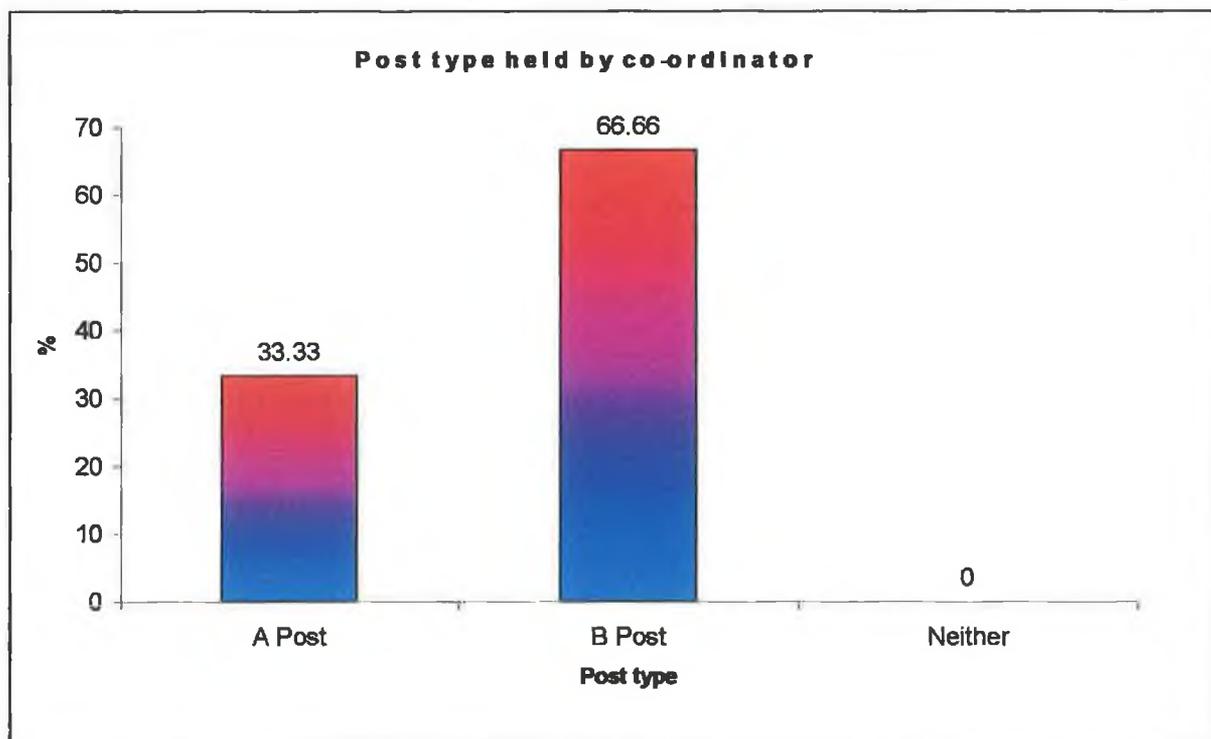
The bar chart (Fig.1.4) shows that 67% of co-ordinators have held the position for a 1-2 year period, while 33% of co-ordinators have remained in the position for more than four years. Clearly the research shows that there is a high turn over of co-ordinates. The overall effect of this could be good for the programme. It could insure that there was a constant input of fresh, new innovative thinking. On the other hand it could signify that the job of the co-ordinator is rigorous and demanding. The co-ordinator must function as a leader of the Transition Year Teaching Team by holding regular meetings with the Transition Year teaching staff and by communicating regularly with the principal, keeping him/she informed of all the activities within the TY Programme. According to ASTI teacher's handbook on the Transition Year Option (1991) the Transition Year Co-ordinator will be responsible for:

- *day to day running of the programme*
- *the out of school activities such as work experience and community service*
- *organize regular planned meetings with his or her Transition Year core team with a view to exchanging information and ideas, and to provide a forum for discussion on any problem that might arise.*
- *ensure that a series of highlights are planned throughout the year so as to combat the likelihood of 'valley periods' in the programme. Such highlights could include drama productions, sporting events, art/craft exhibitions, career exhibitions, educational outings and tours etc.*
- *meet on occasions with teachers of varying subjects*
- *student assessment and programme evaluation*
- *keeping the principal, vice principal, and staff informed of developments within the programme*

- *production of an end of year report in consultation with all Transition Year teachers*
- *keeping a team log book through-out the year*

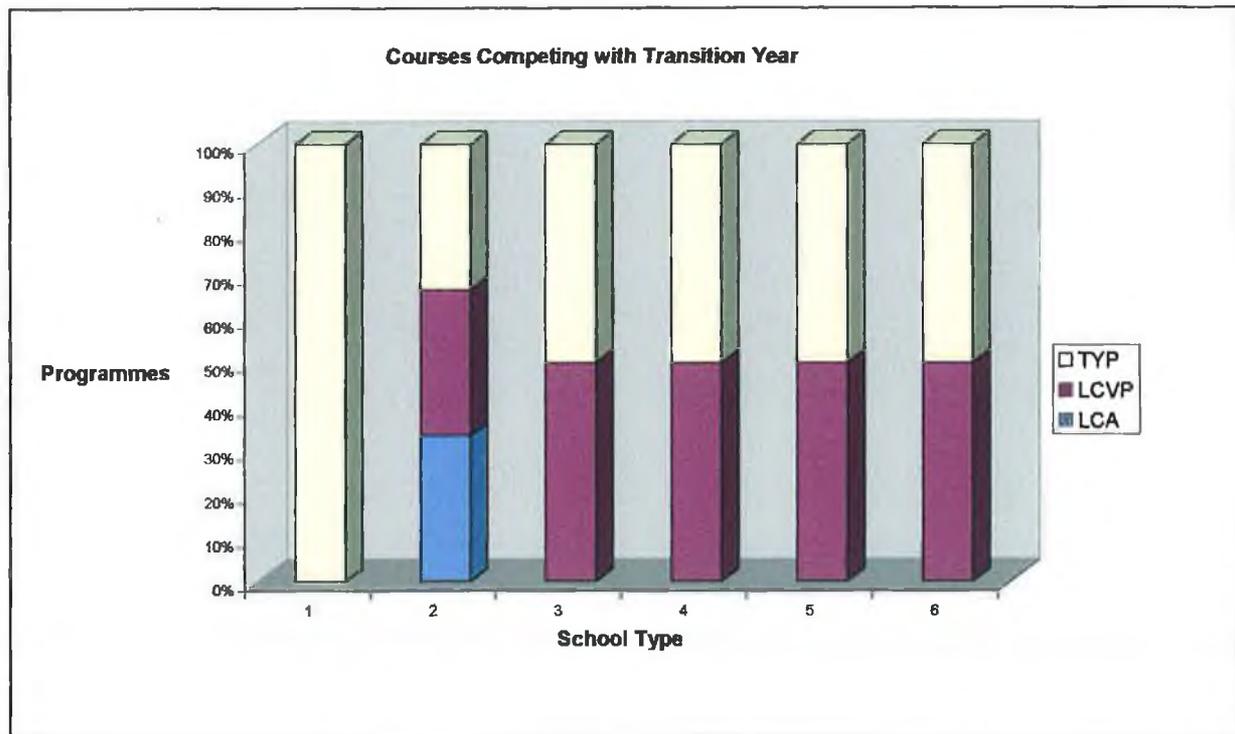
Considering the above list the rigors and demands of the job of the co-ordinator are beyond doubt. The guidelines as outlined by the Department of Education (1993) reminds us “that the co-ordinator should have ultimate responsibility for liaison with the principal, school management, parents, community agencies, and non Transition Year members of staff”. Keeping the latter informed of the TY Programme is most important since the coordinating team will require their continuous support both individually and collectively through-out the year. In the evaluation of the Transition Year by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education (1998-1999) it was found that “an efficient co-ordinator backed up by a committed and representative coordinating team is essential for the effective management of the programme”.

**Fig. 1.5**



of co-ordinators held a B-post of responsibility. 33.3% of co-ordinators held an A-post of responsibility. It is the researcher's opinion that where Transition Year is compulsory the position of co-ordinator should carry an A-Post of responsibility because of the workload involved.

**Fig. 1.6**



The bar charts (Fig. 1.6) show the extent to which LCA and LCVP and Transition Year courses are taking place in the six different schools. School 1 offered Transition Year only i.e. no competition existed. In this school Transition Year was compulsory. School 2 offered all three courses. Again in school 2 Transition Year was compulsory. The participation rate in this school was 26%, which was the second highest participation of the 6 schools. It is reasonable to deduce that competition from the other two courses in this school did not affect the participation rate. Schools 3, 4, 5 and 6 offered both Transition and LCVP to their students. It is interesting to note that in this research LCVP was the more popular choice on

offer along with Transition Year. A possible reason for this was the fact that LCVP was offered as an optional subject in conjunction with other Leaving Certificate subjects.

#### 4.1.1 Important topics for inclusion in the TYP

**Table 1.1: Common curricular areas engaged in by all schools.**

Curricular Area	Periods per week per schools 1-6					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Personal and social development	3	2	2	2	1	2
Career guidance	1	2	1	1	1	1
Religion	1	2	3	2	2	2
P.E	3	2	2	3	2	2
Drama	4	2	3	3	2	2
Art	3	3	4	3	2	2
Music	1	1	2	2	1	2
Irish	3	3	4	3	4	3
English	4	2	4	3	5	4
Maths	3	3	4	3	4	3
Science	2	2	3	2	2	2
Foreign Languages	2	4	3	3	4	3
Information Technology	3	3	4	2	2	3
Business Enterprise Studies	2	2	4	2	2	2

The above table shows the curricular areas that are common to all six schools; it also indicates the number of periods per week given to each curricular area across the six schools. Heavy emphasis is placed on Irish, English, Maths, and Foreign languages thus providing a solid foundation for those subjects in their up coming Leaving Certificates. All

co-ordinators felt it was important to try and incorporate the following topics in the Transition Year Programme, Personal and Social Development, Health Education, First Aid, Civic, Social and Political Education, Career Guidance, Religion, Physical Education, Leisure Pursuits, Drama, Music, Arts/Crafts, Critical Reading, Irish, English, Foreign Languages, Maths, Science, Information Technology, Mini Company, Work Experience, Study Techniques. On analysing the curriculum areas common to all six schools, table 1.1 was produced. The table also gives the number of periods per week given to each of these curriculum areas.

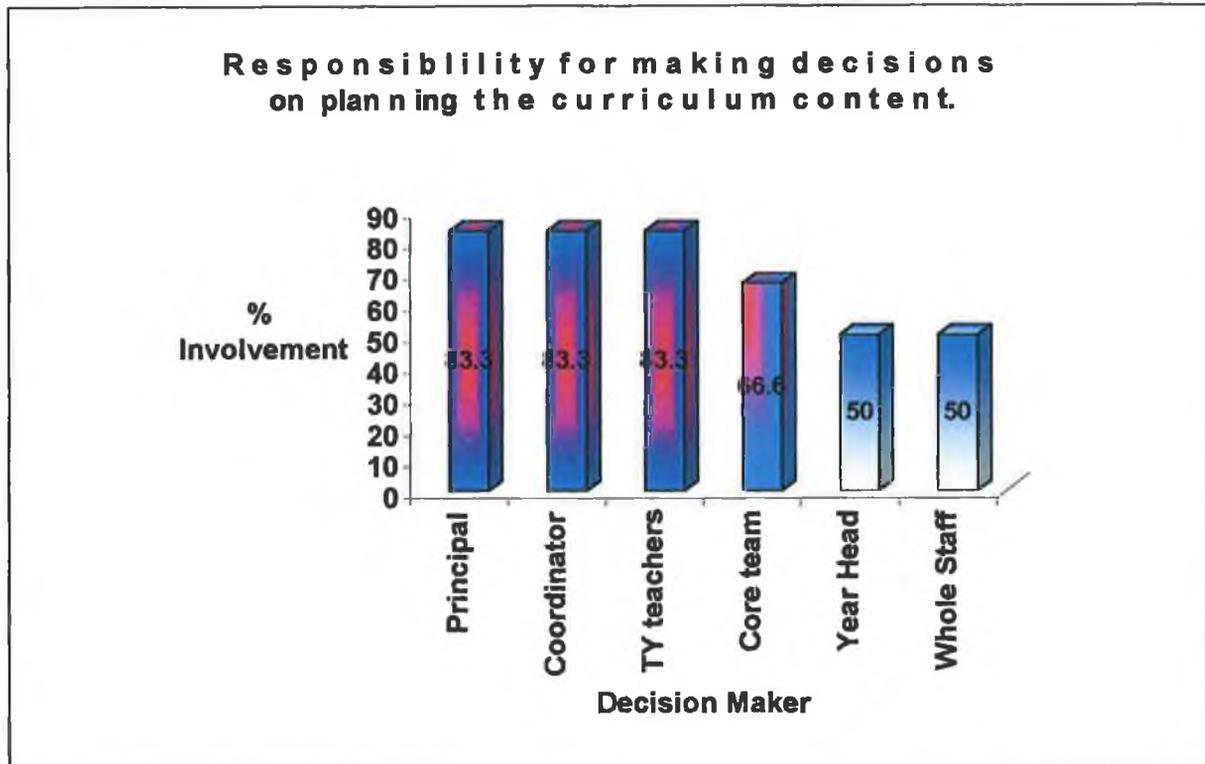
The Transition Year Programme is intended to cater for the needs and capacities of young people within a framework of a broad general education, which includes academic studies, personal development, and education for working life. The programme is intended to be viewed as a distinct programme in its own right which must be carefully designed so it is not considered an easy option for students. On the other hand care should be taken so that it does not become overloaded or so tightly structured that students have little opportunity to escape the pressures usually associated with the Leaving Certificate. In this regard the guidelines as laid down by the Department of Education (1993) are explicit. The “context and methodology of the programme should be decided upon in the light of the levels of ability and needs of the particular pupils” of a particular school. Implementing and providing an imaginative, innovative, and thought provoking programmes will become challenges for many schools. It is important that the programme starts with clear aims. In addition to using the guidelines as laid down by the Department of Education (1993) the schools own mission and ethos must be considered. These aims must take into account the

needs of the students and parents as well as the resources available to the school. The programme is unique to each school and each subject or module within the programme should be designed by each subject department within the school.

The White Paper *Charting Our Education Future* (1995) makes explicit the non-examination emphasis of the TYP. It states “the programme aims to help students acquire skills and enables them to evaluate life in ways and situations, which arise outside the boundaries of the certificate programmes”.

Detailed planning is essential for the success of the TYP. In relation to planning the programme the leadership role of the principal becomes very evident. He must in conjunction with his staff initiate planning and make decisions about target groups of TY students, aims and objectives of the programme, staffing arrangement for the programme, timetable arrangements, and resource requirements. Not only will the principal have to be wise in selecting a teacher who would make a good co-ordinator but he must also allocate responsibility for other aspects of the programme, like the controller of funds, responsibility for preparing students for their work experience, and evaluating this work experience. How the principal deals with time tabling difficulties is a matter of concern for his role as a leader and manager. He can demonstrate his good leadership skills in this regard by having issues in relation to time tabling resolved well in advance of the commencement of the academic year.

Fig. 1.7

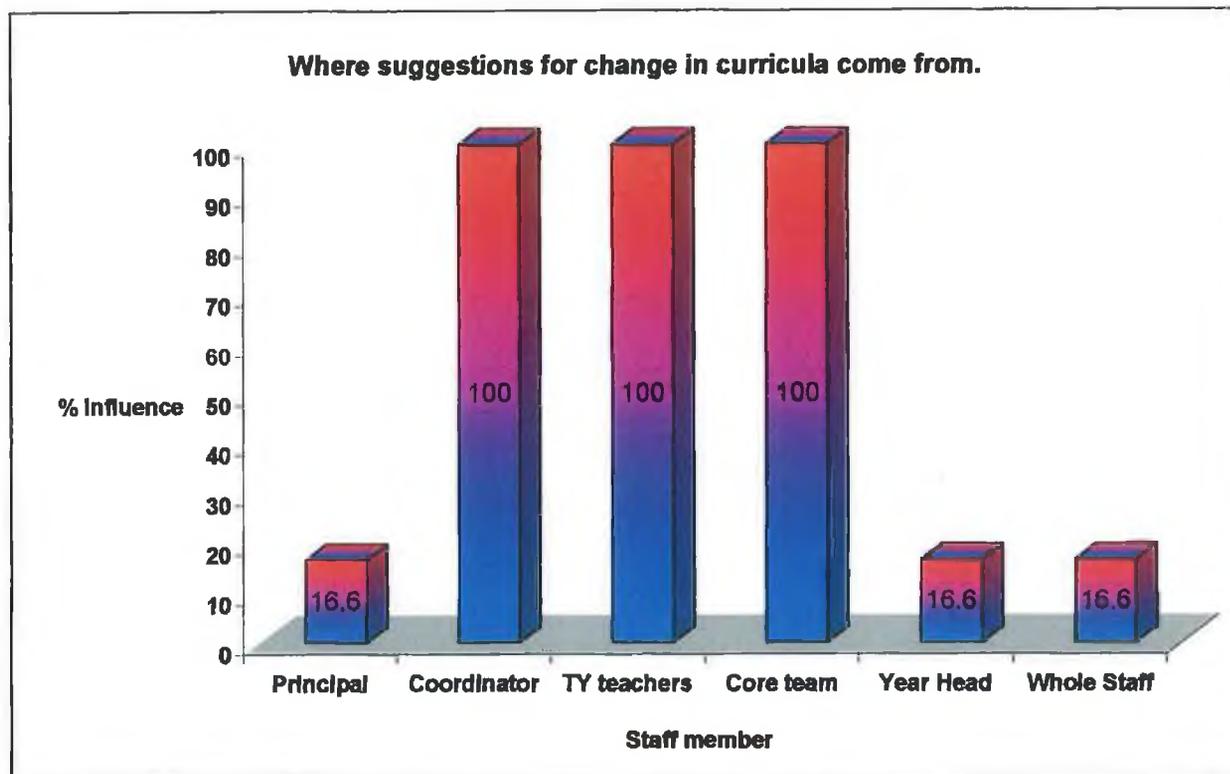


### Responsibility for making decisions about planning

The responsibility of decision making in relation to planning the curriculum lies greatly with the principal, co-ordinator and TY teachers who appear to share equal input in the decision making process (Fig.1.7). Whilst on the other hand year head and whole staff appear to have least input in the decision making process in relation to curriculum planning. From the graph we can see that only in 50% of cases are either the year head or whole staff involved in decisions about planning the curriculum (Fig.1.7). On examining the guidelines as laid down by the Department of Education (1993) it is stressed that the “core Transition Year group should be drawn from distinct curricular areas so that each area may act as a stimulator, co-ordinator, and rappoerteur of activities in his/her area”. In the guidelines laid

down by the Department of Education (1993) it is stressed that “planning for TY is part of school planning in general involving the entire staff”. Detailed planning and implementing should be delegated to the co-ordinator and his/her team, subject to providing adequate feed back to management and school staff. In the present research there was definite evidence that this was taking place in four out of the six schools. Planning for the TYP affords principals the opportunity to be not only managers but also leaders. The researcher found those empowerment processes and indeed teacher affirmations were widely promoted and supported in a variety of ways. For optimum effectiveness in relation to running the TYP the principal must emerge as a both a strong leader and manager. Teachers and co-ordinators need to be told regularly that they are doing a good job. They need to be affirmed and supported constantly. In this regard the principal needs to be a good listener, encourage his/her teachers to take risks. The principal must ensure that his staff is provided with the appropriate development opportunities, which is consistent with the notion of change, innovation, and personal growth. Innovative principals encourage their teachers to experiment and upgrade their professional knowledge. The present research found that limited attention was given to individual teacher growth. To a large extent teacher development was seen as solely the responsibility of the teacher. Principals by valuing their staff accept their input into key decisions and they accept control and responsibility should be spread widely within the school. Increasing empowerment does not necessarily mean increased productivity but rather having influence over school policies is associated with better quality teaching in the classroom.

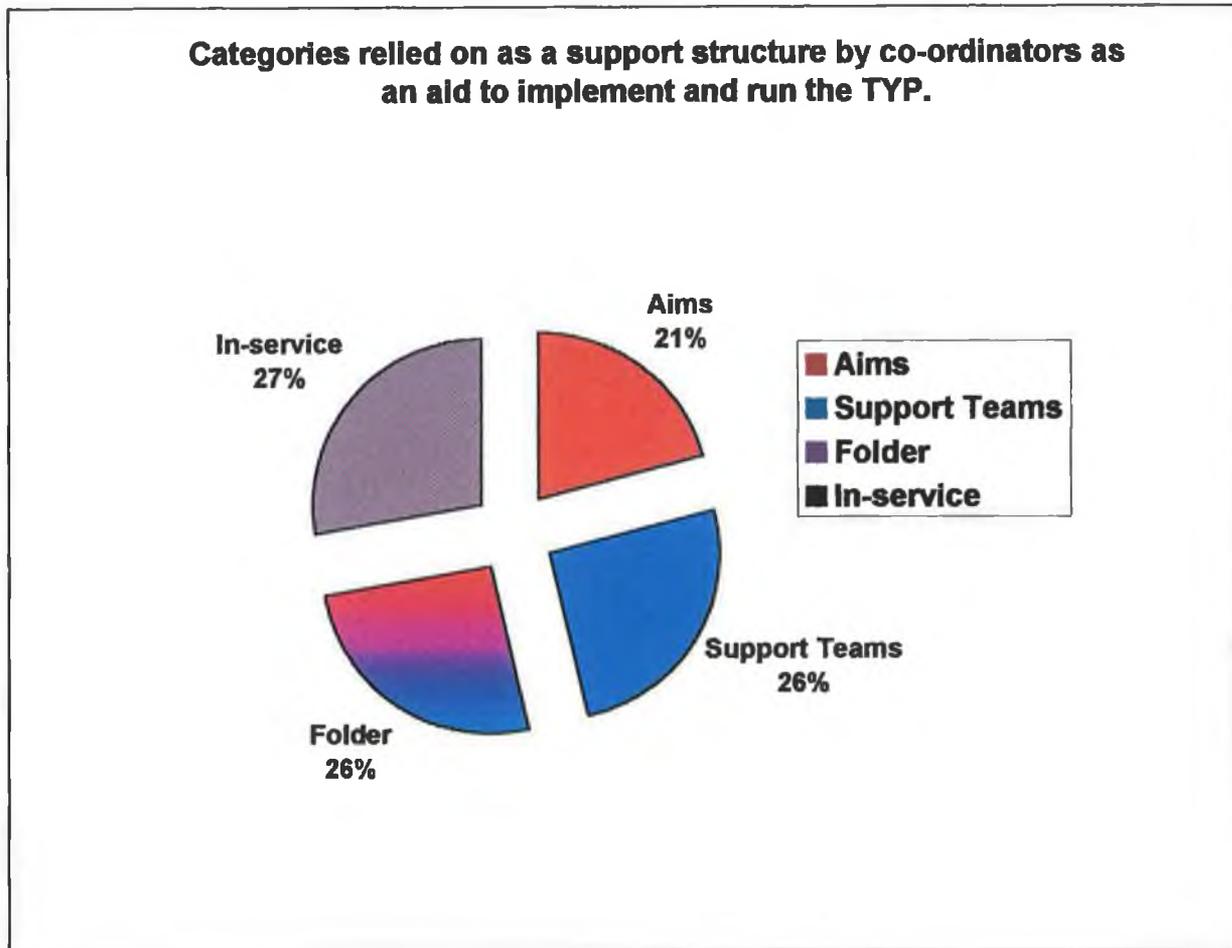
**Fig. 1.8**



**Where suggestions for change in curricula come from.**

Suggestions for changes in the curricula come in the main from the co-ordinator, TY teachers, core team with occasional suggestions coming from year head, whole staff and principal (Fig.1.8).

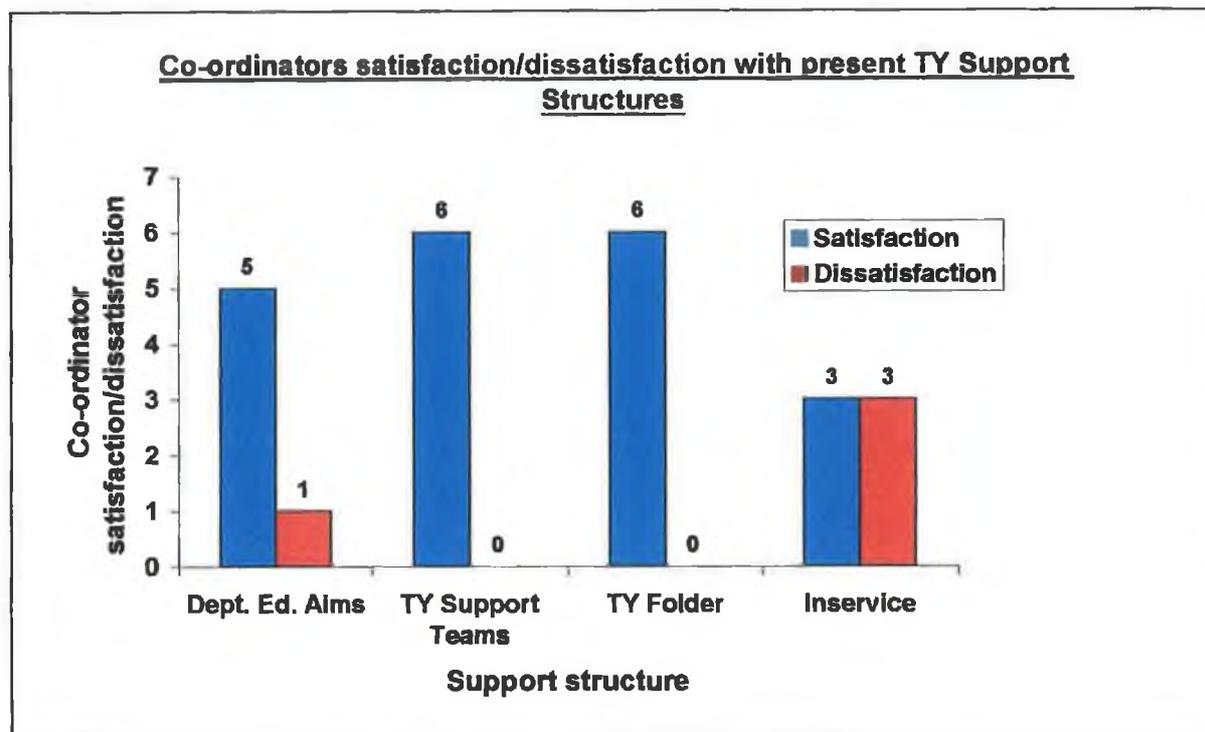
Fig. 1.9



### **Reliance on support structures by co-ordinators.**

There was almost equal reliance by co-ordinators on Department Aims, Support Teams, and Transition Year Folder and In-service as support structures for implementing and running the TYP (Fig. 1.9). Overall there was a slightly lower reliance on Aims set out by the Department of Education, which perhaps suggests that people would prefer to be shown or told how to do something rather than have to consult Aims as written by the Department. This does not necessarily mean that the in-service support provided was adequate but only that this is the primary source of reliance. The next bar chart (Fig. 1.10) gives a more in-depth view on how co-ordinators rated their in-service.

Fig. 1.10

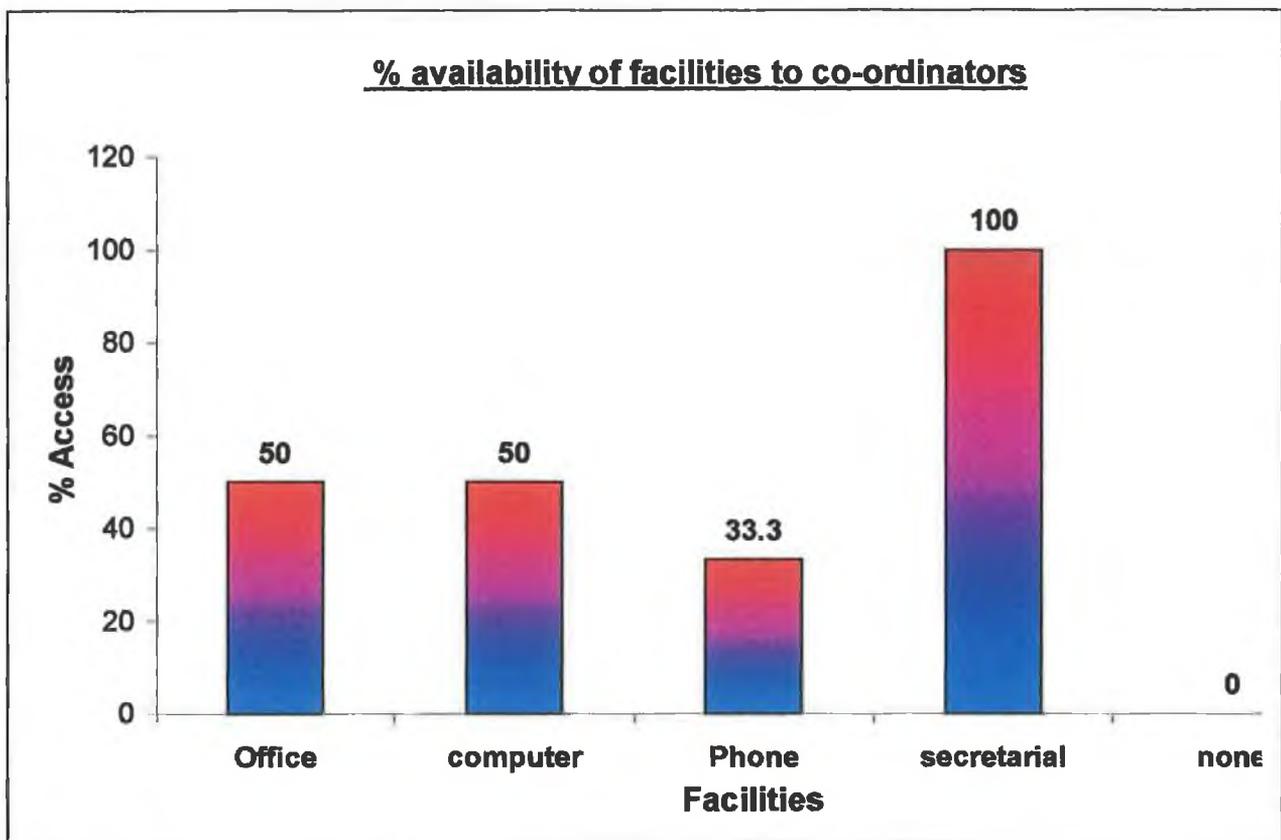


Ideally there should be equal input from all four-support structures. Perhaps this is why people are so dissatisfied with this service as they rely on this in-service support to a great extent for implementing the TYP. This bar chart also shows that there is a 100% satisfaction rating with both the Transition Year Folder and the Transition Year Curriculum Support Service but at the same time there is a 50% dissatisfaction rating with the in-service they got for their position as co-ordinator. It should be noted that all co-ordinators in this research availed of in-service.

The Transition Year Curriculum Support Service, which is based in Blackrock Education Centre, services the Transition Year programme. The report of the Inspectorate of the Department of Education (1998-1999) stated "that the Transition Year Curriculum Support

Service is as essential to the Transition Year Programme as text books are to a main stream curriculum subject". The Support Team develops new teaching resources, holds regular workshops for co-ordinators, and publishes a much-appreciated Transition Year Programme newsletter. The report of the Inspectorate (1998-1999) goes on to say that "the benefits of the Transition Year Support Team input can be seen in highly developed professionalism among the Transition Year Programme co-ordinators in schools. It can be seen in the very sophisticated programs that many of the teachers have developed. It can be seen in the innovative approaches that the Transition Year teachers have developed. In regard to pupil assessment and programme evaluation".

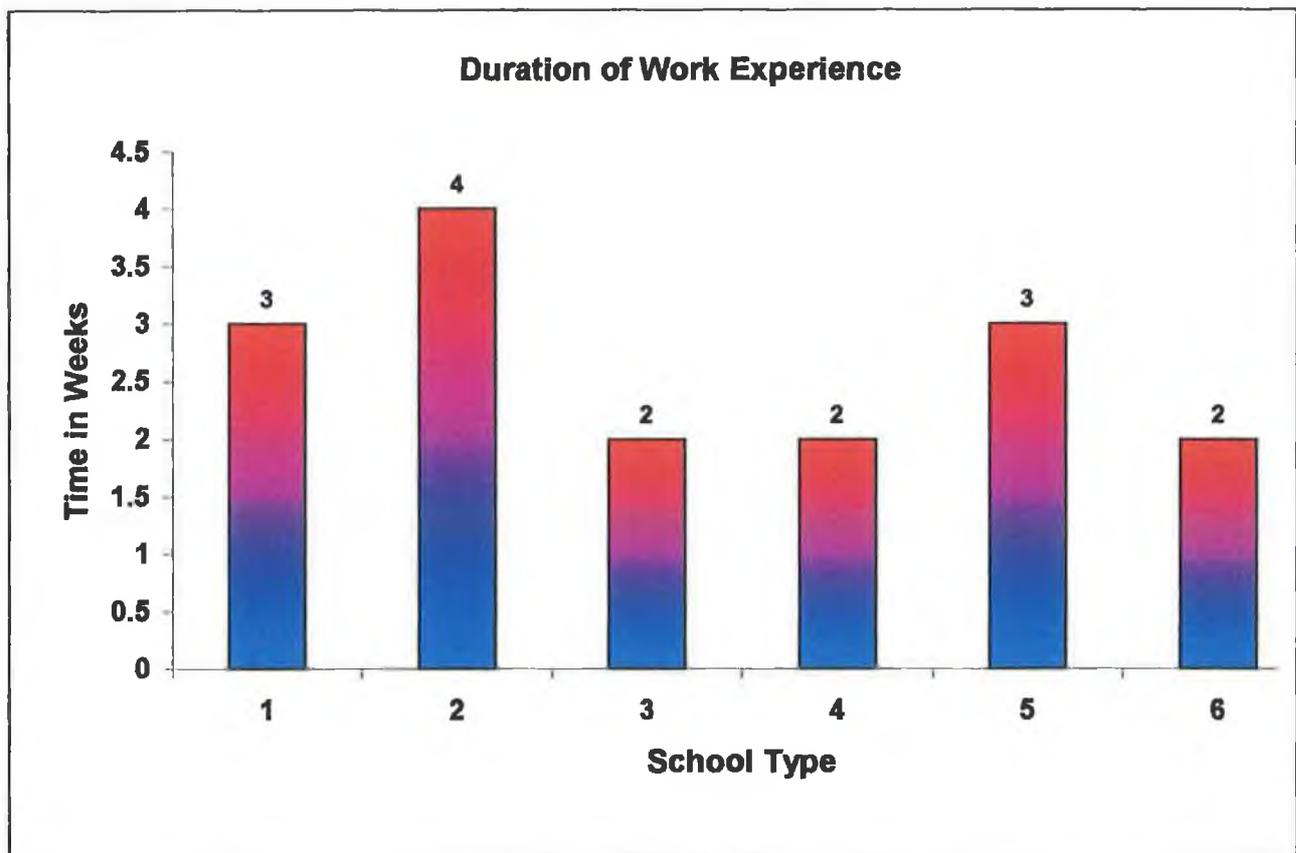
**Fig. 1.11**



## The availability of facilities for co-ordinators

As can be seen from the graph (Fig. 1.11) all co-ordinators have secretarial services available to them but it is interesting to note that only 50% of co-ordinators have their own office or computer, while only 33% have phone facilities. Co-ordinators should have good facilities so as to enable them to do the best job possible.

Fig. 1.12



## Duration of work experience

As can be seen from the graph (Fig. 1.12) all students received a minimum of 2 weeks work experience while in one particular school the students received 4 weeks work experience. In the remaining two schools students received 3 weeks work experience. In the present research the duration of work experience varied from school to school. This variation gives

an indicator of how the Transition Year Programme is being implemented in a variety of ways. This variation seemed to be influenced by the ethos and traditions of the school. It is noteworthy that those schools whose curricula had traditionally an academic orientation, had shorter work experiences, while those with a vocational bent opted for longer periods. Five of the schools encouraged their students to find their own work experience, emphasizing the learning possibilities in such searching, while the remaining school had developed partnerships and contact with their own employers who were by and large parents of pupils attending the school. Egan O and Reilly J (1980) found in evaluating the Transition Year project that 'all students' benefited from work experience. They also found that employers were helpful in facilitating the placement of students.

The White Paper *Charting our Education Future* (1995) states "parents, the community, and local enterprise can bring to the Transition Year a sense of the world and so contribute to an education which faces the demands and pleasures of life, work, sport, and leisure". An evaluation of the Transition Year Programme by the Inspectorate (1998-1999) found that the emphasis on work experience varied somewhat from school to school, as did the nature of the work engaged by the pupils. This seemed to be due in some instances to the different traditions of the schools and the varied socio-economic background of the students. In the present research because of the constraint of time it was not possible to research the nature of the work experience engaged in by individual students. However, there was widespread acceptance by principals, teachers, and students in all schools that work experience was a vital element in the overall Transition Year Programme and that the education benefits

accruing to the pupils far out weighed the difficulties encountered by the school in organizing and evaluating work experience.

Part of the purpose of work experience is to bridge the gap between school and the world of work. In this regard it is worth noting that the guidelines laid down by the Department of Education (1993) that students be provided during Transition Year with an opportunity to learn in different environments such as the work place, helping to “dispel the notion that learning is something that happens only or even more effectively within the classroom”. It is important to both employers and students should be fully briefed about what is involved and those pupils should be adequately covered by insurance. The guidelines laid down by the Department of Education (1993) states the aims of work experience are:

- 1. to develop an understanding of work and for community service in terms of its structures and processes*
- 2. to promote the development and appreciation of social and other skills required*
- 3. to provide skills relating to finding work, such as preparation of curriculum vitae, job search strategies, job applications, interview techniques etc.*

By taking part in work experience students enhance their self confidence and according to some of the principals students come to a greater appreciation of what school is all about. The co-ordinator must accept the responsibility of informing the Transition Year teaching staff and principal on the timing and duration of the work experience, so that they are aware of student's absence from school. It is also necessary to seek the help of the guidance

councilor so that he/she can brief the students on such issues as presentation, self image, communication skills, the need for punctuality etc. It should also be noted the some supervision of the students is essential during the process. On return to the school a debriefing session should be arranged preferably away from the school environment and the students work experience diaries should be reviewed. The debriefing should cover:

- the nature of the work experience carried out and a brief description of the work
- a review of the benefits accrued from the work experience
- an analysis of how the work place differs from the school
- examination of the influence of work experience on subject and career choices

**Table 1.2: Existence of features/factors as aids to planning the TYP**

<b>Planning Aid</b>	<b>Total Yes</b>	<b>Total No</b>
Provision of time tabled time for planning	4	2
Provision of time tabled time for developing new resources	1	5
Team teaching	4	2
Collaborative teaching approaches	5	1
Cross curricular activities	6	0
Decision making participation :		
• Co-ordinator	6	0
• Year-head	4	2
• Core management team	5	1
• TY teachers	6	0
• Whole staff	3	3
Developing ties with the local community/employers	5	1

Provision of timetabled planning time exists in four of the six schools (Table 1.2) but it is noteworthy that the provision of timetabled time for developing of new resources is practically non-existent. In most schools team teaching and collaborative teaching approaches exist. Cross-curricular activities in relation to Transition Year takes place in all schools. The co-ordinator, year head, core management team are all involved in decisions in relation to planning but it is noteworthy that the whole staff are only involved in 50% of the schools. It is also of interest to note that five out of the six schools have developed strong ties with their local community and employers.

**Table 1.3: Important features/factors in implementing TYP as seen by Co-ordinators.**

Support Feature	Total Yes	Total No
Support from Principal	6	0
Support from staff members	6	0
Support from parents	6	0
Support from Department of Education	5	1
Clear aims	5	1
Teacher attitude to change	6	0
Additional time for planning	5	1
Curriculum development assistance	5	1
Funding	6	0
In-service training	6	0

Co-ordinators in all schools rate support from principal, support from staff, support from parents, funding and in-service training to be important factors in implementing the TYP (Table 1.3). Almost equally important is their view on support from the Department of Education, clear aims, additional time for planning and assistance in developing the curriculum. As can be seen from the table the role of the principal is pivotal. His support for the programme must be evidenced in the daily life of the school. He must make every

opportunity to constantly affirm the teachers and students on their achievements. An achievement of any kind must be acknowledged over the intercom on a daily basis. He must when making daily announcements praise the students for their whole-hearted involvement, praise the teachers for their commitment. By so doing everyone in the school is in no doubt about the support of the principal for TYP. Co-ordinators need to feel they are supported and praised regularly for the work they are doing. The principal must also engage with the students on their experiences of the TYP. He must inform the board of management at regular intervals about the progress and achievements of the TYP. The Education Act 1998 (Section 23) specifically refers to the leadership expectations as follows, “ the principal shall provide leadership to the teachers and other staff and the students of the school”.

#### **4.1.2 The existence of a core team**

A core team existed in all but one school and the average composition of this team consisted of three to six members.

#### **4.1.3 Time-allowance for the co-ordinator**

In all cases the co-ordinators received a reduction of four hours per week in their teaching time bringing their maximum class contact hours per week to eighteen. However, it is noteworthy that in one school the co-ordinator received a six-hour reduction in time. According to all co-ordinators their reduction in class teaching time was totally inadequate.

#### **4.1.4 Information in relation to Transition Year**

All schools provided parents with information on Transition Year by means of an information night held in the school. In addition to this, three of the six schools provided information on a monthly basis on happenings in the Transition Year by means of a School Newsletter produced by the students of Transition Year. In all schools there was a special Graduation Night in which certificates and various awards were given to the students. The parents were invited in all cases to this Graduation Night. In the schools where TY was optional the co-ordinators felt it was vital to secure the support of parents for the Transition Year Programme before attempting to persuade the students about its many advantages. In all six schools surveyed a parent information evening was organized by the co-ordinator. At those information evenings it was usual for the co-ordinator, principal, year head, and guidance councilor to address the parents on the following issues:

- The broad aims and philosophy of the TYP
- The specific aims of the TYP in the specific school in question
- The opportunities for personal and social development within the TYP
- The broad range of subjects on offer and a rough guide to the content of each subject
- The need for parental support was stressed for the success of the programme especially in implementing initiatives like work experience
- Parents were made aware of costs that would accrue to them as a result of their children's participation in the TYP
- Parents were informed of the different styles of teaching and the changed nature of the students homework

- Most importantly parents were informed of the need for the students to become actively involved in order to achieve the maximum benefit from TYP
- The parents were brought up to date on the latest evaluations of the TYP and on any recent researches and findings in relation to the programme

#### **4.1.5 Evaluation of TYP**

In all cases the TYP was evaluated once per year by principal and whole staff. The extent of this evaluation varied among the six schools. In the schools where TY was optional one co-ordinator felt it was an exercise which had to be gone through with rather than an effort to promote the growth of the programme. At its best, this co-ordinator related, that evaluation got a half-hour slot in an end of year staff meeting. Another co-ordinator questioned the timing of the evaluation. In her case the evaluation took place towards the end of May. She felt teachers in general were pre-occupied with the up-coming state exams and indeed their summer vacation. She was of the opinion that a better time to evaluate the programme was on return after the Easter vacation where teachers have a term left to introduce changes and plan their programs for the next academic year. Where the Transition Year Programme was compulsory it was considered the norm to spend a half-day on the evaluation process. Whenever it takes place evaluation is a vital task for the principal, co-ordinator, and whole staff. Investigating what subjects, modules, events are going well and what are not going so well calls for precise study and debate. Student's views should be sought when critically evaluating the success of new subjects, activities, teaching methods, student difficulties and administrative difficulties. Subsequent to this evaluation planning for the next academic

year should commence. On going internal evaluation is central to the success of a Transition Year Programme and the provision of adequate time for so doing is the hall mark of a principal who is committed to a constantly evolving and vibrant Transition Year Programme for the benefit of its students.

#### **4.1.6 Compulsory/optional nature of TY**

In the case of compulsory TY, co-ordinators felt that the students were more motivated and they were of the opinion that it enabled the students to make more informed decisions about possible subject uptake at Leaving Certificate level. It was also their opinion that as a result of taking the TY, students had matured and were more committed to their Leaving Certificate studies. They felt that where TY was compulsory the programme tended to run more smoothly and students remained as an original group. Compulsory TY they thought eliminated those students who tended to do TY simply because their friends were doing it or indeed not to do TY because their friends were not doing it. Where TY was optional co-ordinators felt that students were more motivated and parental support was more forthcoming. They were also of the opinion that TY does not suit all students which would give rise to a lack of motivation in the event of students being compelled to do TY. They felt also that where numbers of students are small as in the case of optional Transition Year the range and variety of subjects that are on offer tended to diminish giving rise to a possible narrow based curriculum.

### **4.1.7 Co-ordinator satisfaction with their position**

In all cases the research showed that all co-ordinators said they were satisfied with their job as co-ordinator. When asked about rating their job, they all replied that they were either very satisfied or quiet satisfied. They felt the skills they needed most were, good communicator, organizer, negotiator, forward planner, mediator, hard worker, driven, good telephonist, typist, fax operator, IT. skills, teamwork skills, budget management. They all felt they developed confidence and forward planning skills and they felt they needed more leadership skills, computer skills and organizational skills.

### **4.1.8 Certification**

This research found that in all six schools the pupils who successfully completed the TYP were awarded certificates on their graduation night. In the absence of state certification for the TYP it is important for each school to establish some sort of reward system to support and reinforce the values of Transition Year. All six schools designed and awarded their own certification which invariable emphasized such features as commitment, initiative, growth, involvement, involvement in non academic events etc. Certificates in all six schools were formally presented to the students in the presence of their parents and teachers, there by highlighting the status of the programme. The local nature of this certification allowed each school to highlight and distinctive features of their programs as well as individual student achievements.

#### **4.1.9 Advice from existing co-ordinators to prospective co-ordinators.**

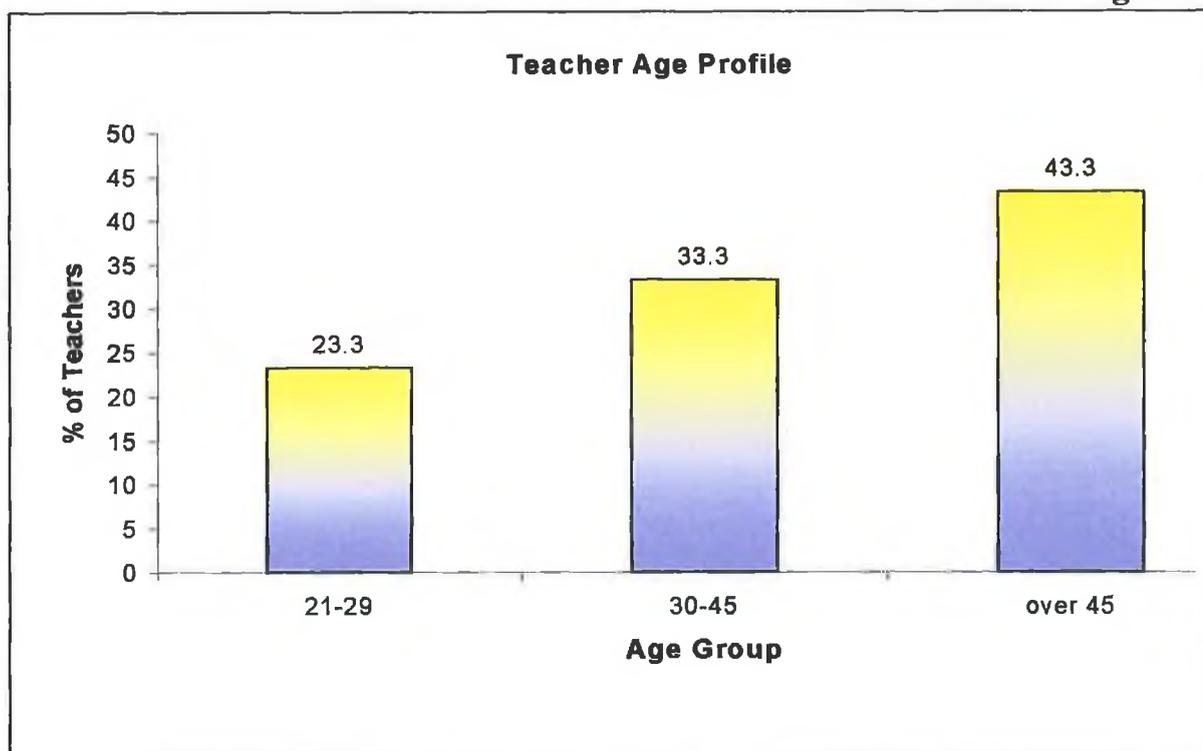
The researcher asked the existing co-ordinators in the six different schools if they had any advice to give to teachers contemplating becoming co-ordinators. They replied as follows:

1. Good planning, organization, and keeping of records is essential
2. There is a need to have an office, phone, and access to secretarial services within the school
3. It is necessary to immerse oneself in all the available information on the TYP and avail off all the in-service on offer
4. The composition of the core team is important. Look for a say in who you would like to work with on this core team
5. Make immediate contact with the Transition Year Support Team, enlist their help and advice
6. Be prepared to develop a rapport with students, Transition Year teachers, and parents
7. Be prepared to communicate well in advance of the commencement of the academic year with Transition Year teachers regarding activities
8. Talk to other co-ordinators in other schools
9. Prepare well for evaluation, insist on a minimum of a half day, and be prepared to involve all staff
10. Have an open ear at all times in order to establish what is working well and not so well.

## **Teacher Questionnaire Analysis**

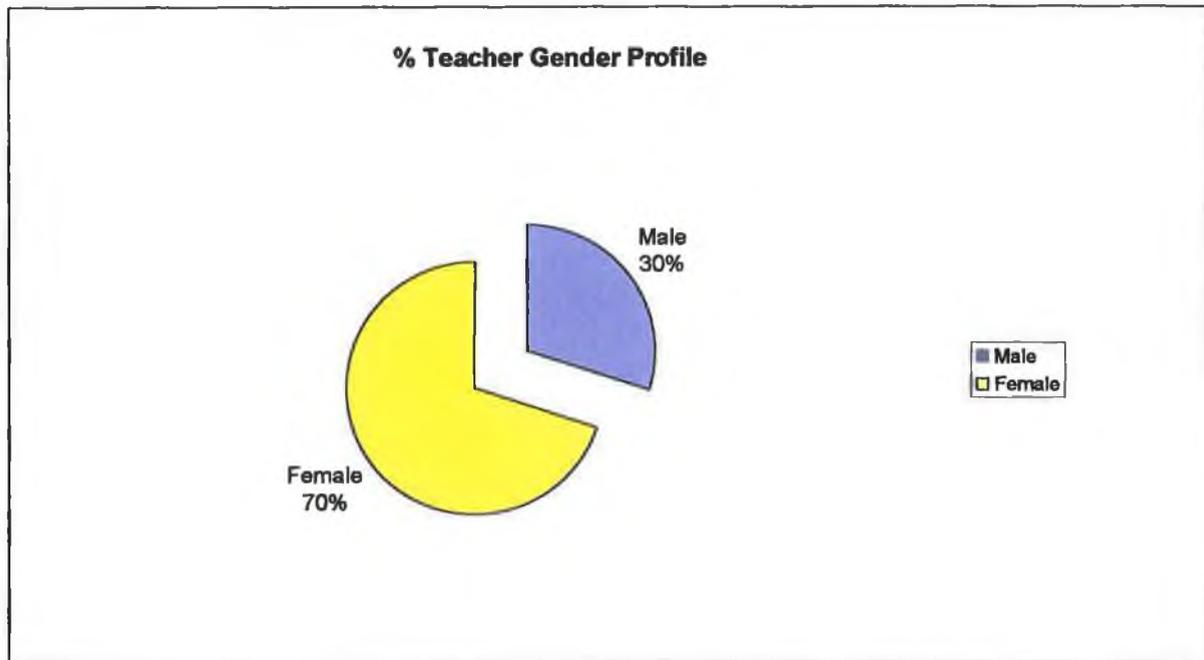
## 4.2 Teacher Questionnaire Analysis

Fig. 2.1



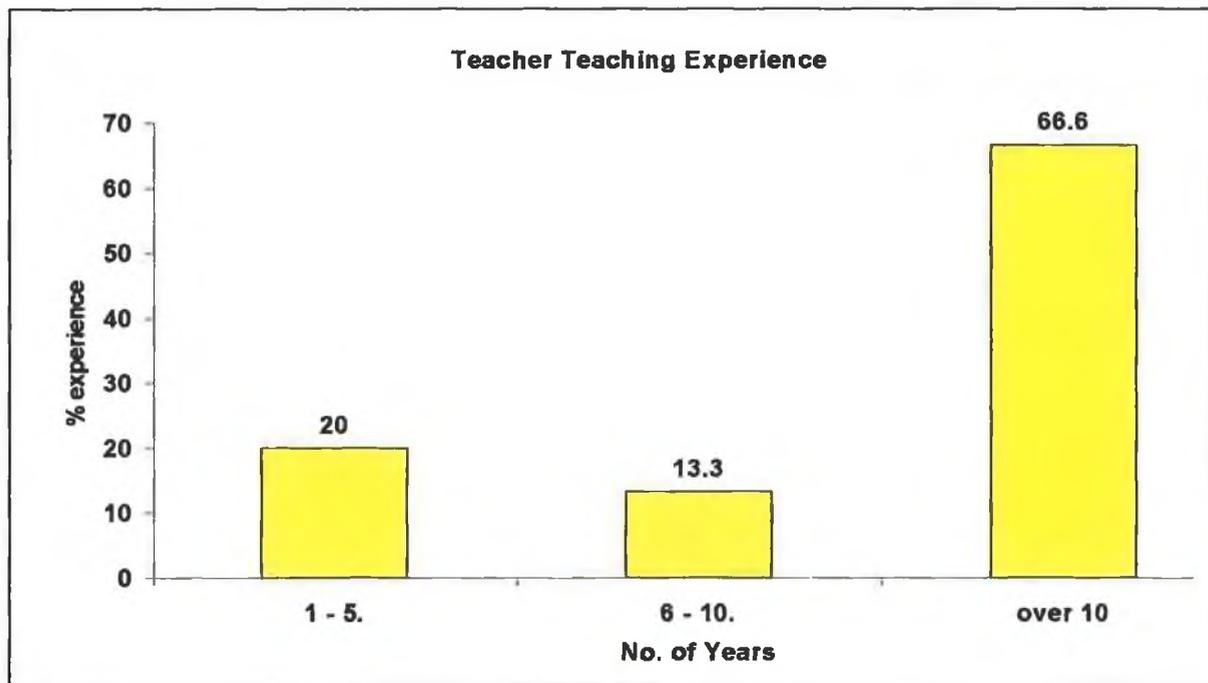
The bar chart (Fig.2.1) shows up an interesting trend in relation to the age profile of teachers who are presently engaged in teaching the Transition Year Programme. As can be seen from the bar chart 76.6% of teachers are above the age of 29 years, while 23.3% of teachers are below the age of 29 years. A possible explanation maybe those older teachers view the Transition Year Programme as a window of opportunity for engaging in real curriculum development in their schools. They are possibly attracted to the nature of the Transition Year Programme and view it as an important challenge in the context of their teaching. On the other hand younger teachers may feel they need space and time to develop the skills, confidence, and knowledge required for designing and evaluating their own programmes. The overall result seems to be that older teachers are more willing to take risks associated with curricular change.

**Fig. 2.2**



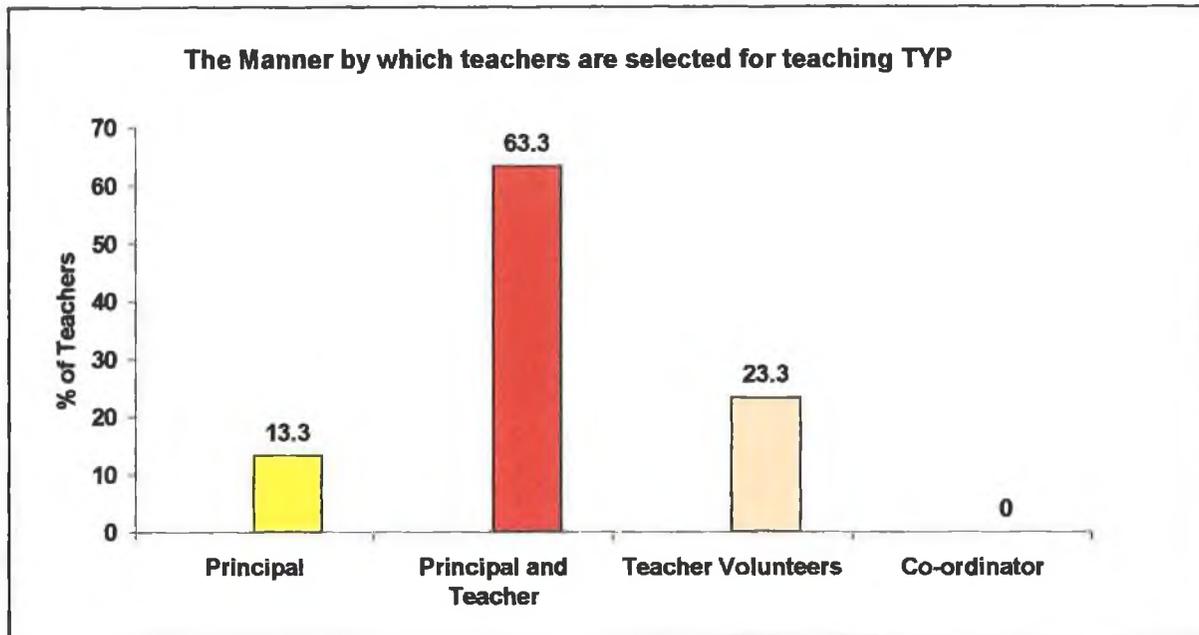
The pie chart (fig.2.2) shows that 70% of the teachers are female while 30% are male.

**Fig. 2.3**



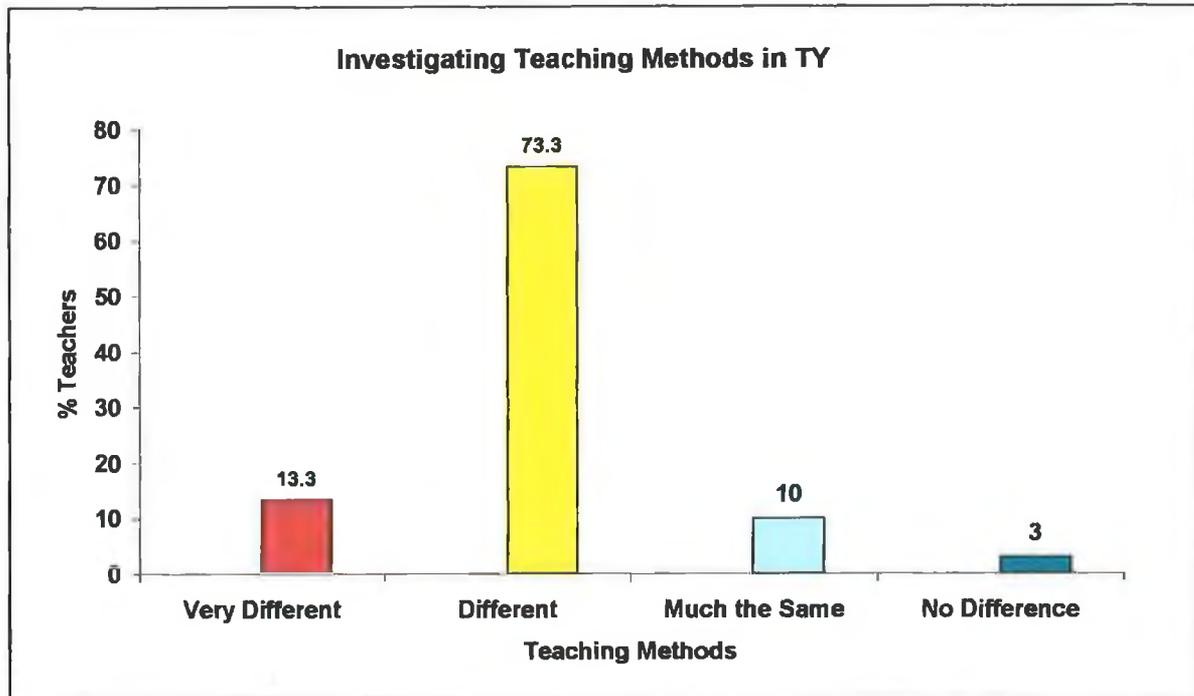
The bar chart shows (fig.2.3) that 80% of Transition Year Teachers have more than 6 years teaching experience, while a mere 20% have less than 5 years experience.

**Fig. 2.4**



This bar chart (fig2.4) relates to the manner in which teachers end up teaching the Transition Year Programme. As can be seen in 86.6% of cases the principal in consultation with the teachers, or the teachers themselves opt to teach the programme. In 13.3% of cases the teachers are required to teach the programme without consultation. The evidence here points to the existence in most cases of a consultative process. The researcher would have liked to explore further what effect this had on the nature of the Transition Year Programme on offer in those schools (i.e. 13.3% of schools) and also what the attitude of those teachers to the compulsory nature of having to teach the Transition Year Programme. Perhaps a possible reason was that the principals were operating under the constraints of limited specialist teachers for teaching some parts of the TYP. This has implications for the role of the principal as a leader as well as a manager of this greatest resource i.e. his teachers. This 13.3% of teachers may have inevitable effects on both the quality and nature of the TY Programme on offer to the students.

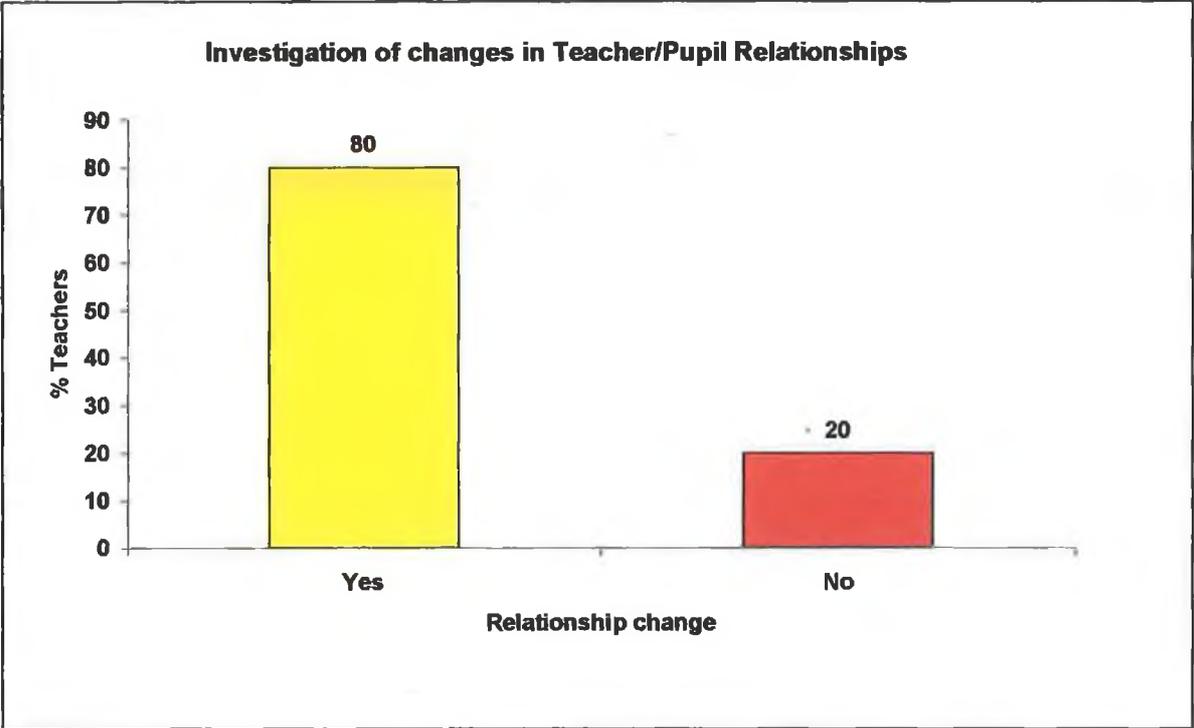
**Fig. 2.5**



86.6% of teachers (fig2.5) said their teaching methods within the TYP called for changes in teaching practices, while 13% of teachers found no change occurred in their teaching practices. Teachers were of the opinion that in the absence of an exam they were allowed to teach in a more relaxed atmosphere with more time for greater interaction with their students. It allowed more time for discussions, group work, research, field trips, visits to theatres, and in general time for more active learning methodologies. They found trips outside the school gave rise to on-site education for their students. There is greater use by teachers of aids such as videos, television, computers and newspapers. The nature of the work in the classroom in many instances takes the form of project, research work, puzzles, drama, music where assessment is very often based on project work or oral presentations. Students are given more autonomy and in many cases get involved in peer teaching. Overall a greater trust is established between the teacher and pupils. Teachers get the opportunity to digress and deal with topical issues of the day. It is clear from the research that the

opportunities have been grasped by 86.6% of teachers to modify and adapt their teaching processes. When the students were asked if they had noticed any change in teacher methods 75.6% (fig3.4) they said they observed changes in teachers methods. The Department of Education guidelines (1993) informs us that the key feature of the Transition Year should be the use of a wide range of teaching/learning methodologies and situations. In the evaluation of the TYP by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education (1998-99) said “like the TYP itself it is a case of learning by doing. Teachers engaged in the TYP have to devise, develop, resource, and assess their own teaching programs. It is not surprising that some of the most dynamic teachers in the schools are heavily involved in the TYP. They see it as an opportunity to be creative and innovative”.

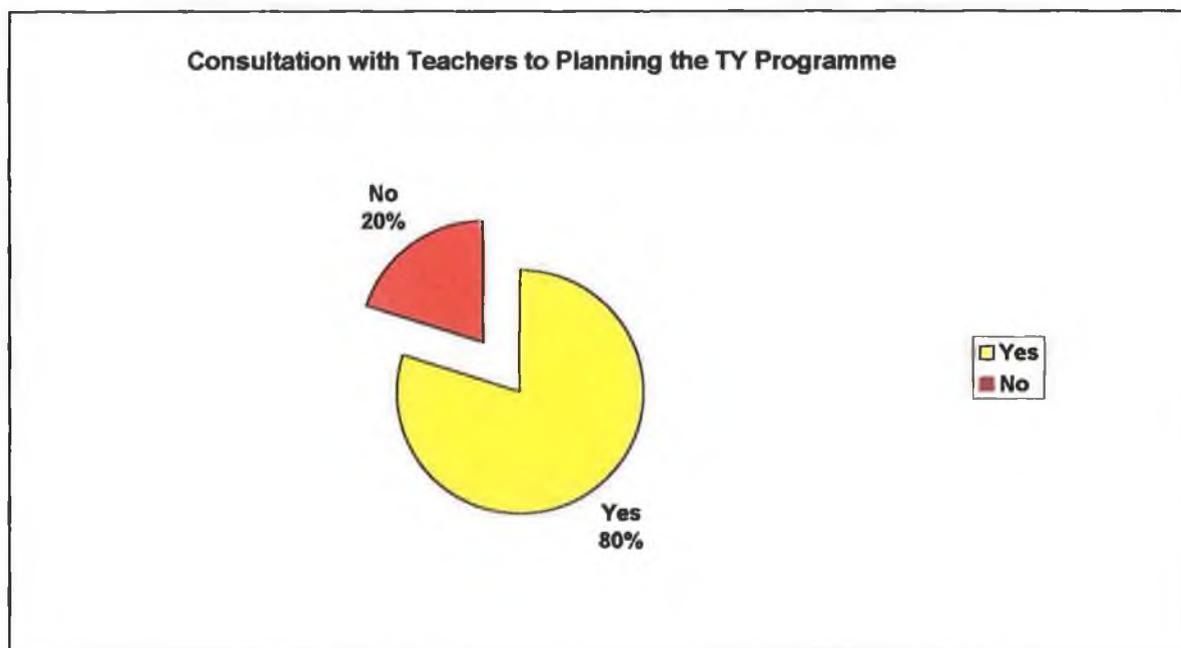
**Fig. 2.6**



80% of teachers (fig2.6) said that relationships changed for the better with their students.

When students enter 4<sup>th</sup> year they are considered to be Senior Cycle Students. The students adopt a more mature approach to their learning. Some weak students who might otherwise sink to the bottom of the class unnoticed get an opportunity to shine, they become mature, well rounded, confident individuals. The overall attitude of teachers to their students is that they should be given more freedom. Consequently they are given opportunities to be more responsible for their own learning. They are given every opportunity to show and exercise leadership qualities within the classroom. This figure of 80% contrasts with the figure of 64.3% of students who thought relationships had changed with their teachers. A central aspect of the TYP as defined by the guidelines as laid down by the Department of Education (1993) is that “the Transition Year Programme should aim to identify and eliminate weakness and develop the confidence and attitude of students”.

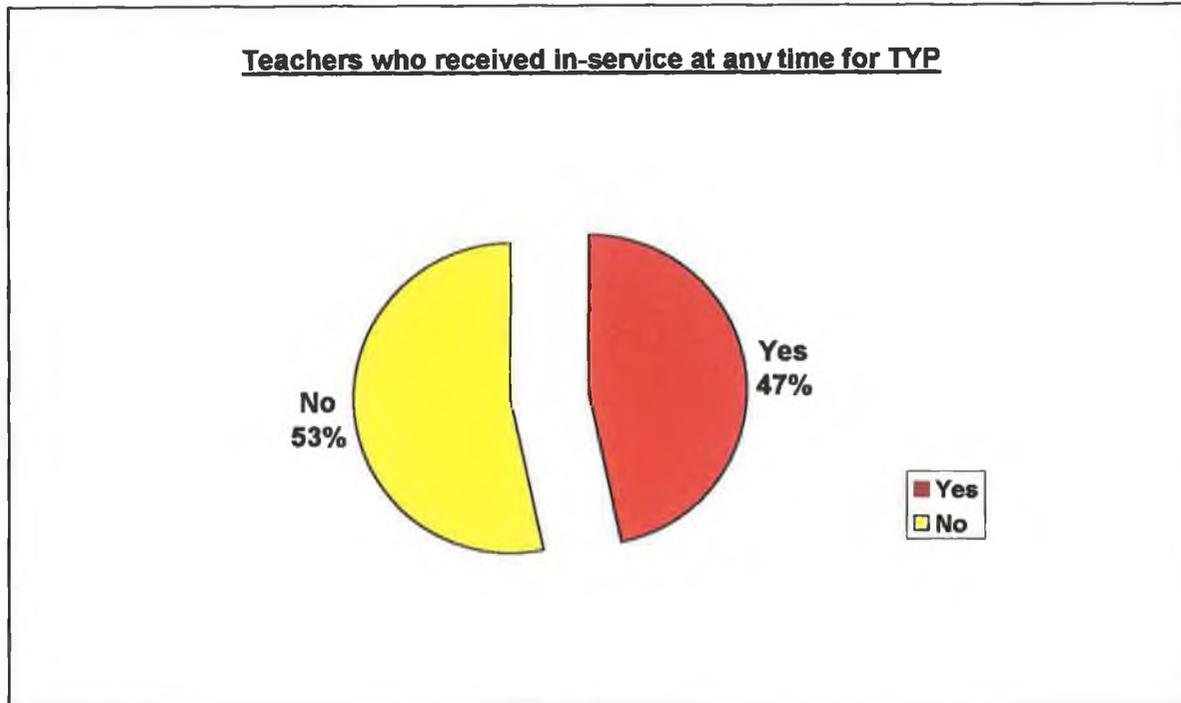
**Fig. 2.7**



Pie chart (fig2.7) shows that 80% of Transition Year teachers have a say in planning the TY Programme in their school. In all cases then the teachers and co-ordinator were involved to

varying degrees in planning programs. Teachers were continuously involved in various discussions about the curriculum in order to insure balance and development of various aspects of the students. In two schools teachers of the English Department got together and designed their own textbook to suit the needs of their students. Most schools had fortnightly meetings to discuss such things as the planning and organization of upcoming events, possible introduction of new programs such as ECDL, music, budget etc. the research shows it is common for department teachers to meet and plan collaboratively their own program's. Teachers judgements and ideas about the educational processes within the Transition Year Program are both valued and needed to improve the overall quality of the programme. This research shows that overall, decisions are decentralized. This research also shows that the overall operation of the programme is not left to the principal or co-ordinator or core management team. There is a shared decision making process which is considered to be both faster and more consistent. The research shows that empowerment processes are being widely promoted and supported in a variety of ways. The guidelines as laid down by the Department of Education (1993) stresses the need for planning for TYP to be part of school planning in general involving the entire staff. In this regard planning relies on the principal's good leadership skills. It is necessary to keep all staff informed of developments and provide them with a forum through which they can air their views. Meetings with the entire staff should be organized a least once per term during the academic year. Experience has shown that the support of the entire staff is essential to the success of the TYP.

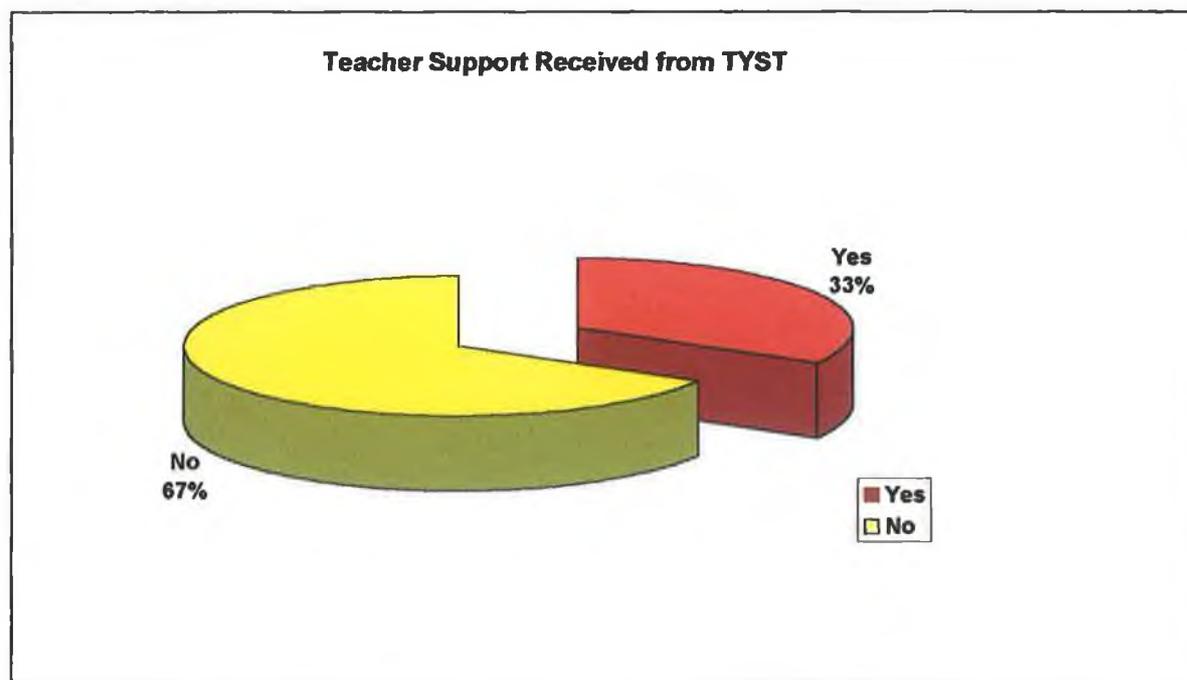
Fig. 2.8



Pie chart (fig2.8) shows that 53% of teachers currently teaching the TYP did not receive in-service of any kind. Herein lies the challenge for the Department of Education. When the research asked teachers in what areas they would most like in-service, they requested in-service involving planning modules, operating mini company, PE, individual teacher subject areas, organizing programs and trips, teaching methods, information technology, and knowledge about the latest computers packages available. In-service for the TYP have been almost singularly focused on co-ordinators. The feed back from the teachers suggests that the availability of in-service is fairly limited. It is widely accepted that the in-service aspect of Transition Year has remained largely underdeveloped. The White Paper *Charting Our Education Future* (1995) (p.126) refers to a consistent theme running through the debate of the reform of the education system as being a unanimous acceptance of the need for a cohesive national policy on, and a comprehensive programme of in-career professional

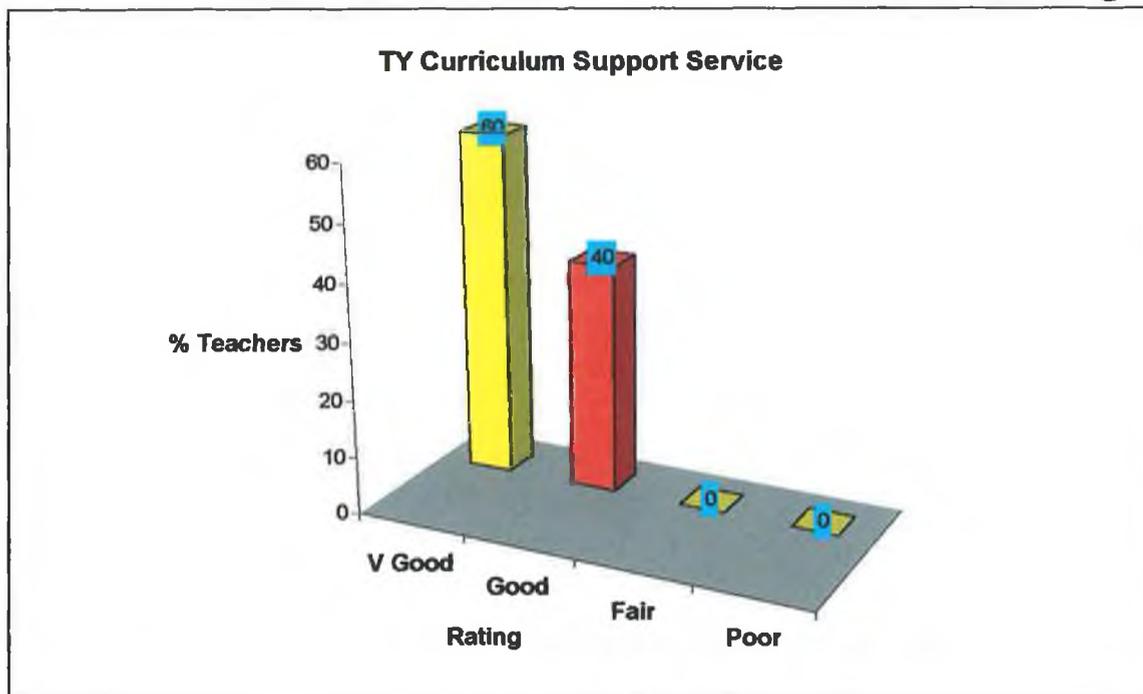
development for teachers. The Report of the National Education Convention (1994) (p.87) states “there should be a variety of in-service teacher education, including an emphasis on school based in-service provision. In-service teacher education should take into account the personal and professional needs of the teacher, as well as those of the school system”. Apart from the limited support from the Transition Year Curriculum Support Service and the Education Centre networks no framework exists for the provision of proper in-service training for teachers in relation to the general orientation of the Transition Year Programme. In relation to in-service the guidelines as laid down by the Department of Education (1993) that it will be a condition of participation in the Transition Year Programme that schools will become involved in programs of staff development/in-service education which will be locally and regionally based. In this way, participation by individual schools will be possible in the formulation, delivery, and ongoing development of the programs for their own benefit.

**Fig. 2.9**



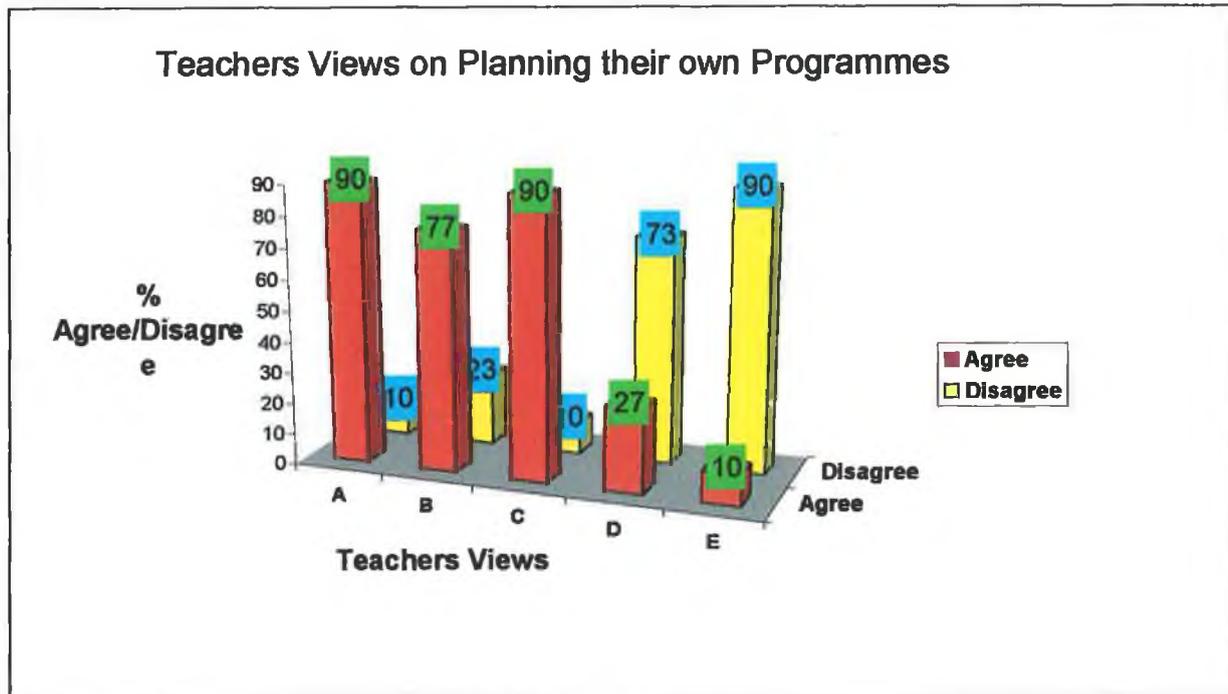
As can be seen from (fig2.9) 67% of teachers never got any support TYST. The challenge here is for the TYCSS to reach this 67% in order to improve the quality of their teaching and ultimately the quality of learning involved for the students. 33% received support of some kind and all of this 33% found the support to be good (fig2.10).

**Fig. 2.10**



Again this appears to be an area that needs to be addressed urgently. The research shows the quality of the in-service supplied by the TY Curriculum Support Service is not an issue but what is at issue is the accessibility to these support structures for many teachers. The general point emerging here echoes a lot of what the researcher has touched on in the literature review i.e. teachers are apprehensive about changes. However, if good quality support is given they are more likely to embrace the change.

Fig. 2.11



**Key** A = Planning the TYP is a pleasant change from mandated programmes

B = Planning the TYP encourages team work

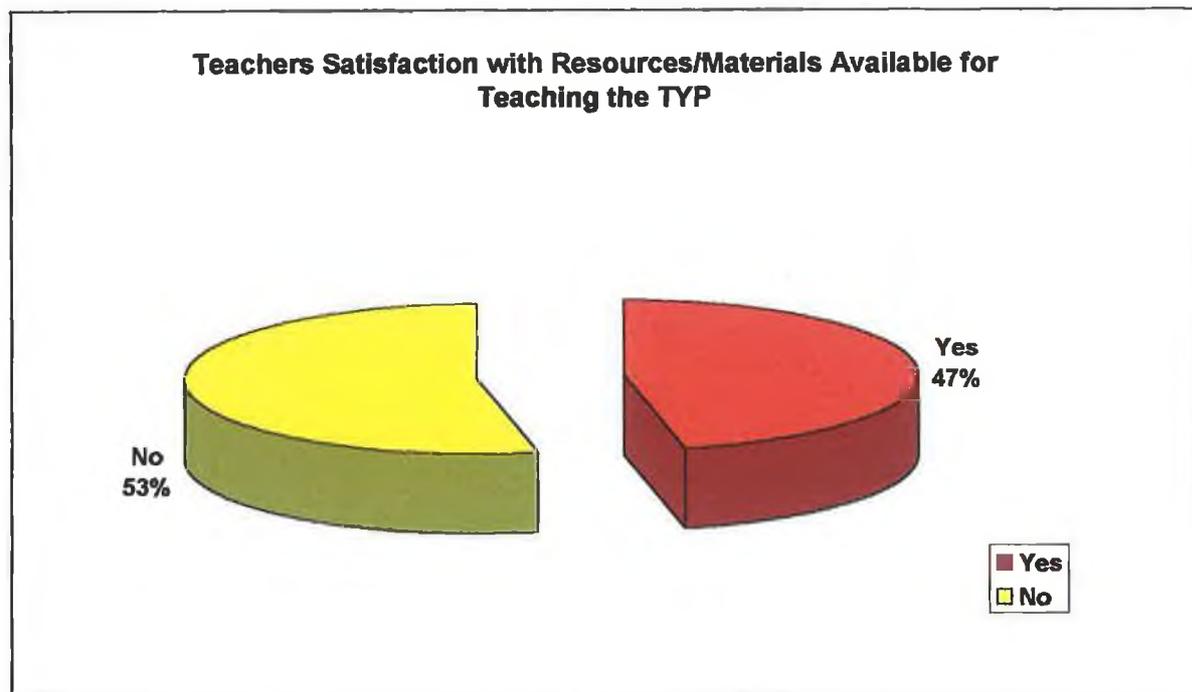
C = Planning the TYP is challenging

D = Planning the TYP is difficult

E = Planning the TYP is a nuisance

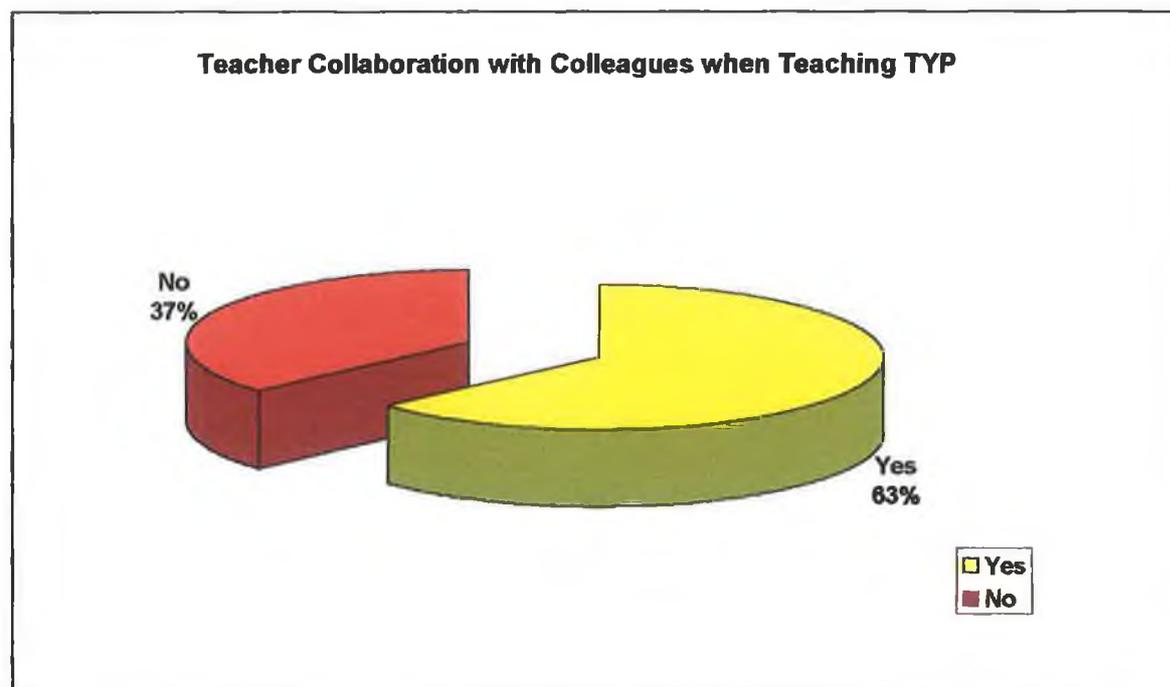
90% of teachers (fig2.11) found planning their own programmes to be both challenging and a pleasant change from mandated programs 77% of teachers agreed that in planning their own programme team work was encouraged. 37% of teachers found that planning their own programs was either difficult or a nuisance.

**Fig. 2.12**



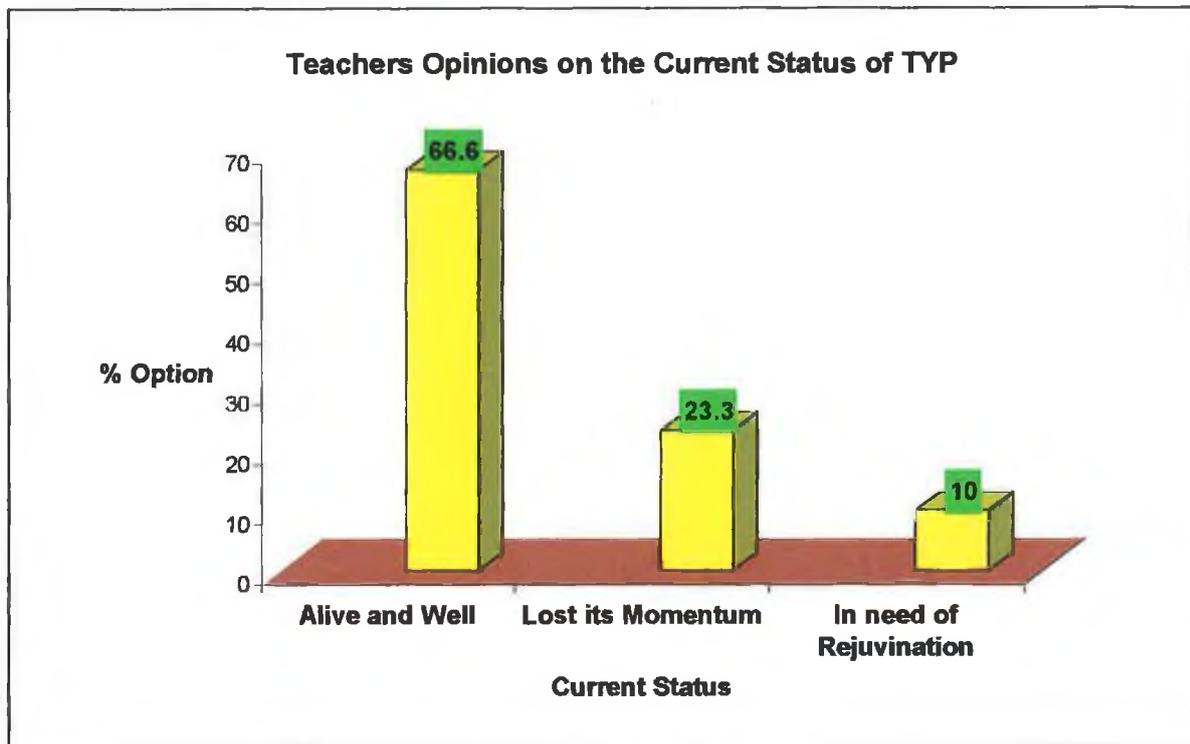
The pie chart (fig2.12) that 53% of teachers are dissatisfied with resources/materials at their disposal for teaching TYP. Well resourced initiatives in TYP are necessary. Qualified and fully resourced teachers are among a school's most valuable resource.

**Fig. 2.13**



63% of teachers (fig2.13) are involved in collaborative processes with their colleagues. This collaboration leads to better decisions, higher quality, and more satisfied students however teachers should be taken out of their classrooms more often for shared meetings.

**Fig. 2.14**



63% (fig2.14) are satisfied with the current status of TYP. 63% feel the program is alive and well whereas 33% feel it has lost its momentum and is in need of some rejuvenation. The underlying value of teacher development emphasizes the fundamental belief that the programme will not improve unless teachers are supported in efforts to take risks and to make changes.

#### **4.2.1 Advice by teachers to fellow teachers contemplating teaching the Transition Year Programme**

When teachers were invited to give advice, they came up with a list of useful suggestions.

Among the more striking suggestions were:

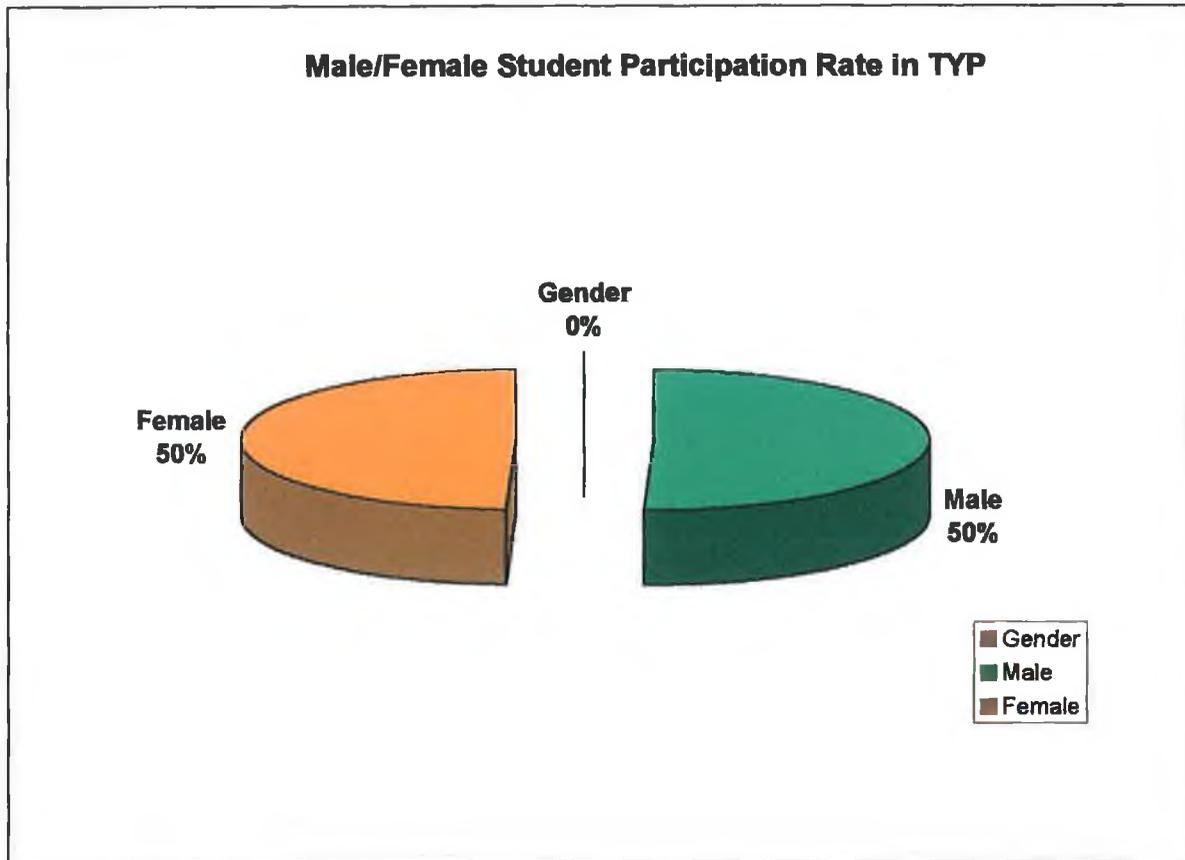
1. There is a need for teachers to think out their programme at least one year in advance and in so doing be prepared to be flexible.
2. A programme must be devised which is useful, relevant, and interesting, firstly to the teacher and then that interest and enthusiasm would be transferred to the students.
3. Be prepared to give your programme plenty of time and commitment.
4. Be imaginative and use as many resources as you can get your hands on.
5. There is a need to research one's subject area well and also a need to be innovative in one's approach.
6. Planning is essential.
7. There is a need to work to student's abilities and interests. This will improve both the students and teacher's attitude.
8. It is essential to be enthusiastic about ones teaching and to try and pick up good practices from other schools i.e. find out what works for them.
9. Be prepared to experiment with new teaching methods and strategies, use plenty of handouts and prepared work sheets.
10. Be prepared to be unselfish with one's time.
11. In relation to languages, it is good to concentrate on the oral content of the course. Encourage research, active participation rather than passive learning. It is an ideal way to promote good study habits.

12. Be always prepared to reevaluate one's programme and update material to suit the students.
13. It is an opportunity for the teacher to become more an assistant to learning rather than a director of learning.
14. It is important to give students a say in what they would like you to teach them.
15. It is a learning experience and therefore not everything will be a resounding success first time round.
16. Enjoy the change and get to know the students better.

## **Student Questionnaire Analysis**

### 4.3 Student Questionnaire Analysis

Fig. 3 .1

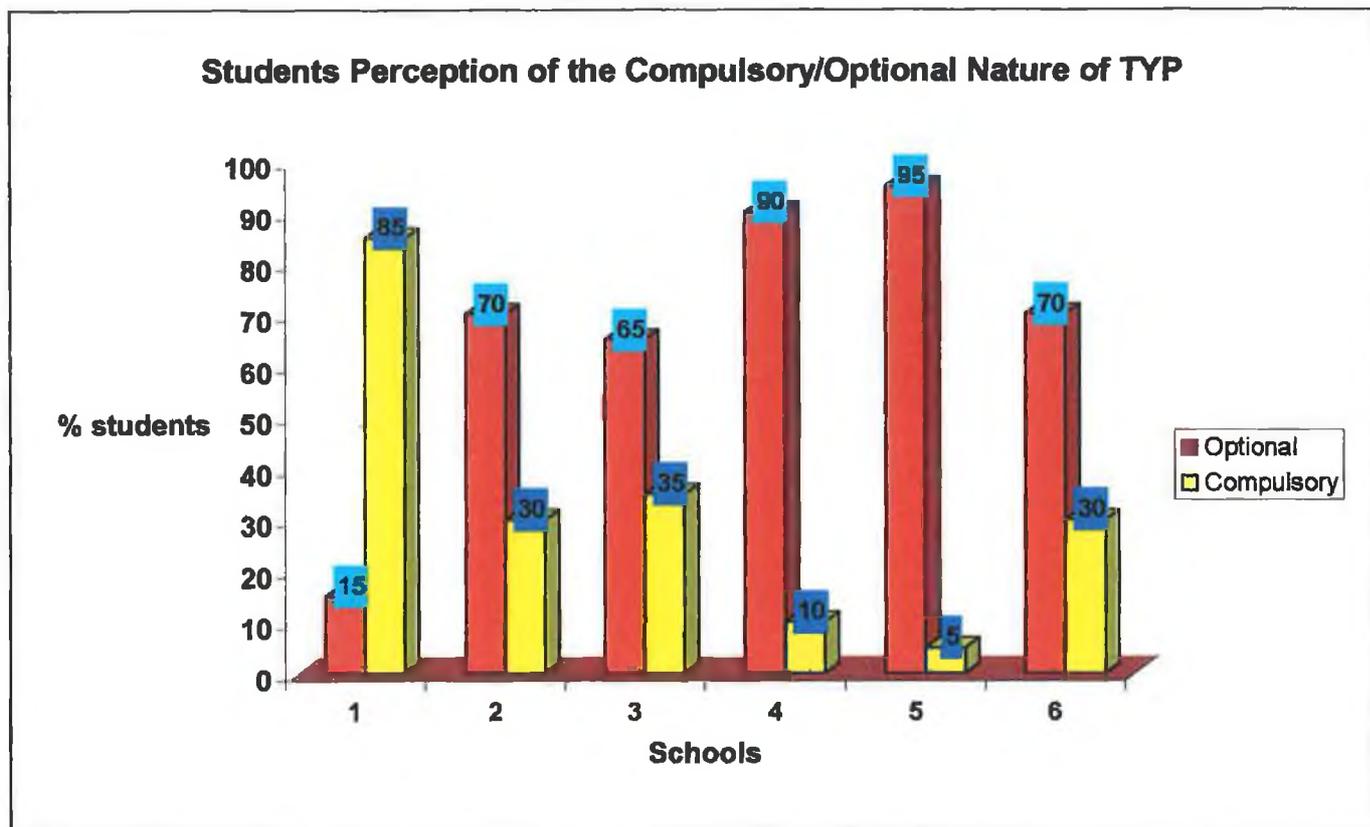


#### Male/Female Student Participation Rate in TYP

As indicated earlier 115 students completed a written questionnaire.

The Pie Chart (Fig. 3.1) gives the gender breakdown of the students who participated in the research. As described earlier in the methodology section sampling of the students was carried out in order to achieve as near as possible an equal gender balance.

Fig. 3.2



### Student Perception of the Compulsory/Optional Nature of TYP

It is quite clear from the bar chart (Fig.3.2), according to the students, that Transition Year Programme should be optional in all schools. When asked to explain why they favoured the optional nature of the programme, they frequently answered by saying they felt the programme did not suit all students. Many students felt they wanted to finish their Leaving Certificate as fast as possible. It was their opinion, the fact that having to do Transition Year deprived them of a possible opportunity of repeating their Leaving Certificate at some time in the future. Many felt they had lost the study habits they had acquired for their Junior Certificate. Many found it difficult to settle into fifth year after having a pressure free, non-

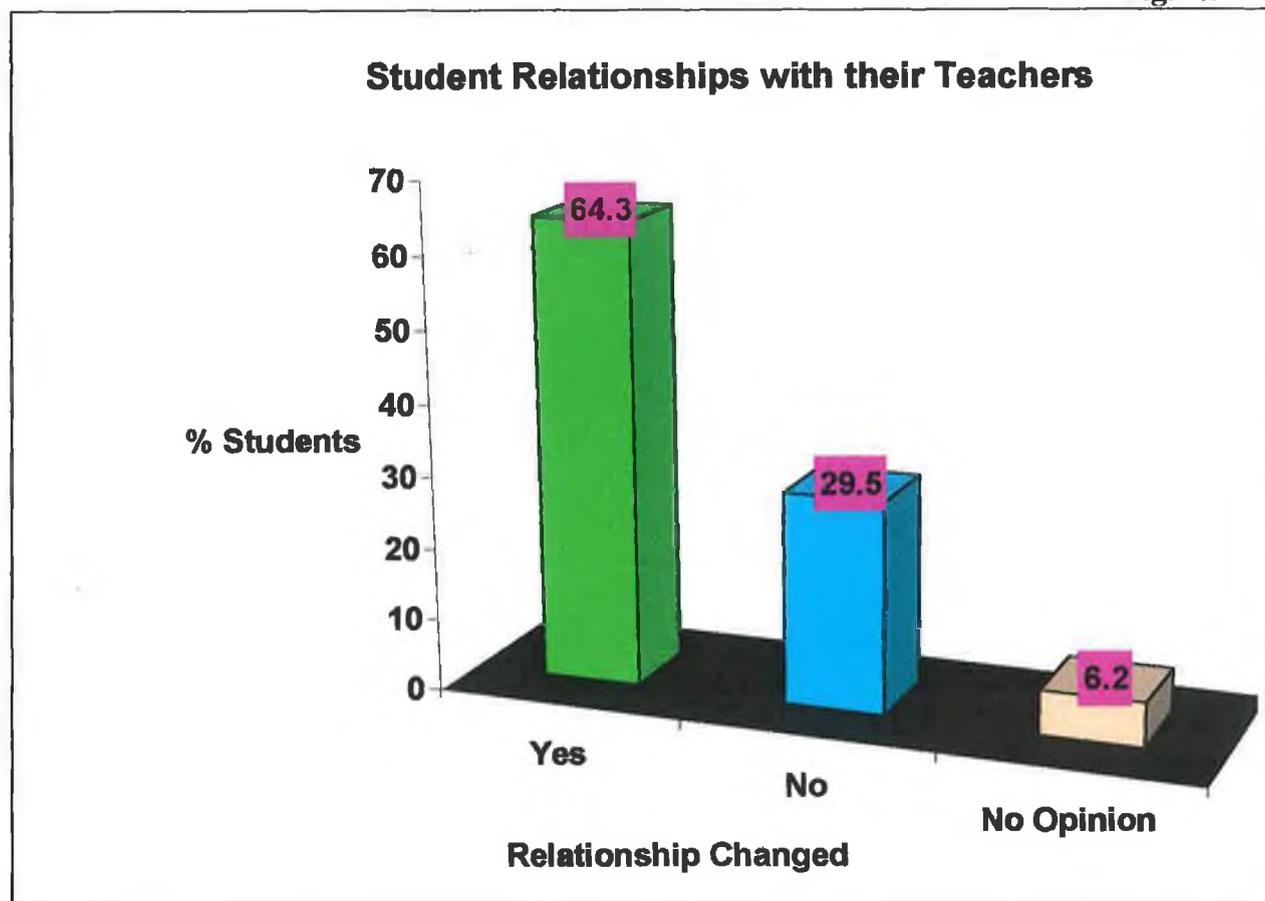
exam oriented year. In fact some of the students questioned the value of what they had done in academic subjects like Maths, English, Irish, Religion, and Health Education.

The Department of Education Guidelines (1993) offers no direction in relation to the compulsory/optional nature of the programme, but in the Inspectors evaluation of the TY Programme (1998-99), they found 33% of the eighteen schools visited had compulsory TY programs. They also found where TY was optional the uptake varied from 20% to 85%. According to the Inspectors report there were two main arguments in favour of making TY compulsory.

- 1. Compulsory Transition Year achieves an economy of scale.*
- 2. They felt it overcame the oft-encountered difficulty of pupils who would like to do the Transition Year Programme, but who decide not to do it because their friends did not wish to do it.*

It is interesting to note from the bar chart that where TY was optional i.e. in schools 4, 5, and 6, there was the greatest need to have choice about doing Transition Year. In schools 2, 3, where Transition Year was compulsory the percentage of students who felt they should have a choice is also considerable. This has implications in many schools for the Transition Year Programme. This highlights the need for a student voice in the overall evaluation of the programme at the end of the year.

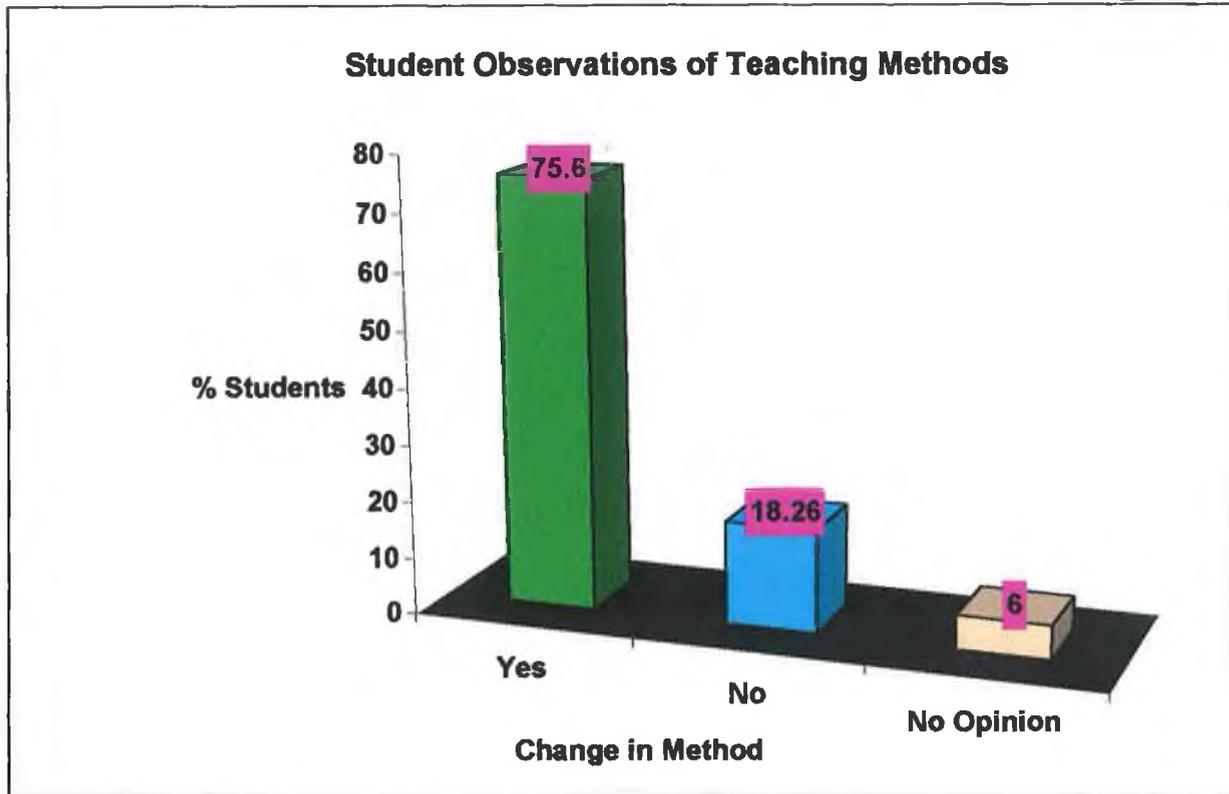
Fig. 3.3



### Student Relationship with their Teachers

The research (Fig. 3.3) shows that relationships between teachers and students changed in the majority of cases (64.3%). A central aspect of the TYP as defined by the guidelines laid down by the Department of Education (1993) is 'remediation and compensatory studies'. Thus the Transition Year Programme should aim to identify and eliminate weakness and develop the confidence and attitude of students which will enable them to make more informed choices when it comes to selecting their subjects for their Leaving Certificate. In this regard the Inspectors report carried out by the Department of Education (1998/89) found many pupils appreciated the bonding effects of TY P on pupil teacher relationships.

Fig. 3.4



### Students Observations of Teaching Methods

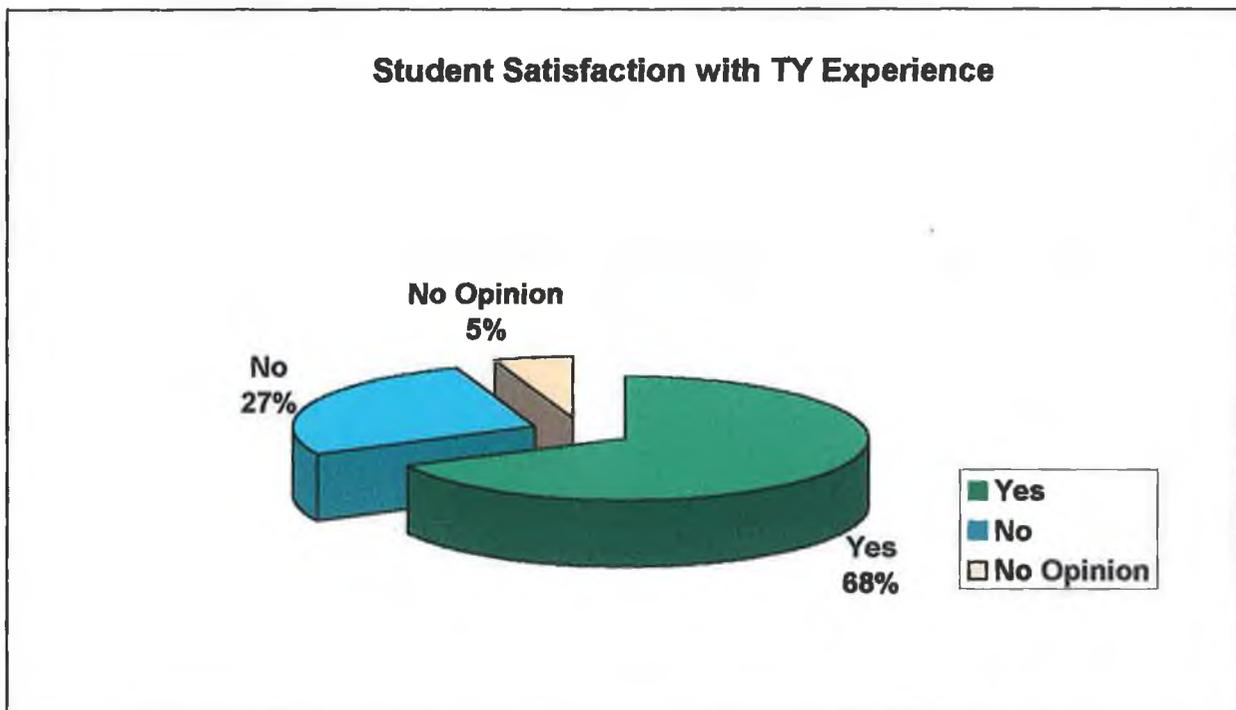
The research shows (Fig. 3.4) that 75.6% of students surveyed observed changes in the teaching methods of their teachers. The Department of Education Guidelines (1993) informs us that a key feature of the Transition Year should be the use of a wide range of teaching/learning methodologies and situations. The goals and objectives of the programme can best be achieved by placing emphasis on the following.

- *Negotiated learning;*
- *Personal responsibility in learning;*
- *Integration of appropriate areas of learning;*
- *Team teaching approaches;*
- *Group work: discussion, debate, interview, role play;*

- *Project work and research;*
- *Visiting speakers and seminars;*
- *Study visits and field trips;*
- *Work experience, work simulation, community service.*

Educational activities undertaken should enable students to have a valid and worthwhile learning experience with emphasis given to develop study skills and self directed learning. Teacher methodology should promote a more positive and self-confident attitude towards learning among the students. It should also allow the students to examine consciously their roles as students.

**Fig. 3.5**



### **Student Satisfaction with TY Experience**

The pie chart shows that participating in Transition Year does appear to have been a worthwhile experience for the majority of students. Despite the fact that no two

programmes were the same in the six schools selected. It was possible to identify common areas within the programs, which they enjoyed most. They were as follows:

- Trips: They all enjoyed the opportunity to get away from the classroom when at all possible. In general trips to the theatre, industry, field trips, heritage studies, and leisure pursuit activities etc. gave them in their opinion opportunities for on the site learning. In all six schools a foreign trip was organized for their Transition Year students.
- Production of a play / drama or musical or central activity: The majority of students felt they enjoyed getting involved in a school play or musical or doing something to raise money for a charity of their own choice. This they felt gave them autonomy and the opportunity to place Transition Year center- stage in their schools. In one particular school the students raised a large sum of money for Our Lady's Hospital Crumlin. They engaged in a number of fund raising activities for one week. They ran a disco, organized a raffle and pushed a bed with a well-known celebrity in the bed around the local housing estate. In another school the TY students organized their own careers exhibition. All the students researched different careers of their choice and put on an exhibition for parents and third year students in their school. The parents and third year students judged the exhibition and three prizes were awarded to the students for the best exhibits.
- Guest speakers: Students relished the opportunity to listen occasionally to special invited guest speakers dealing with every-day issues such as drugs problems, forensic science, nuclear energy, youth leadership etc.
- Work experience: All students valued the opportunity to participate in the world of work. It helped them to relate with people of whom they had no prior dealings. They felt it also gave them the opportunity to observe work place values in operation.

- **Non Familiar Subjects:** Students enjoyed the opportunity to do subjects they had not done before e.g. astronomy, zoology, photography, chess, guitar etc.

On the other hand the students identified aspects of the Transition Year Programme they did not like. They found it was hard to motivate themselves when it came to learning traditional academic subjects such as Irish, English, Math's and foreign languages in the absence of an exam at the end of a year. They enjoyed project work but felt there was an overall tendency to overdo it. Interestingly they disliked situations when teachers were absent; the general tendency in the schools surveyed was to place the students in a hall and simply tell them to study. They found free classes to be boring and they disliked situations where insufficient activities were planned for them. In the TY evaluation by the Inspectorate (1998-99) it was found the students valued the opportunity to be active in a creative way. They also appreciated variety.

**Table 3.1: The Category of student who benefits most from Transition Year as perceived by students**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Percentage of Students</b>
Students who achieve low grades in their Junior Certificate	24.3%
Students who would be too young when sitting their Leaving Certificate	66.82%
All Students who do Transition Year	20.86%
Lazy Students	16.52%
Ambitious Students	46.95%
Students who are late developers	35.65%
Students who are hard workers	32.17%
Students who need high points for entry into a specific course at third level	31.3%

Table 3.1 shows clearly the type of students most likely to benefit from the TY experience in the eyes of the students themselves. According to the students those who benefit most are those who are ambitious, those who would be too young when sitting their Leaving Certificate, those who are late developers, hardworkers or those who need high points for entry into specific courses at third level. Transition Year seems to benefit lazy students least of all in their opinion.

**Table 3.2: Twenty Aims of TY in order of importance as perceived by TY students**

<b>Aims</b>	<b>% Importance</b>	<b>% Unimportant</b>	<b>% Undecided</b>
Gives Students the opportunity to discover information about future careers	90%	1%	9%
Gives Students the opportunity to engage in work experience	90%	4%	6%
TY enables Students to communicate confidently with other people	89%	1%	10%
It gives Students a year free from exam pressure	88%	4%	8%
It allows Students the opportunity to participate in a broad range of subjects	87%	4%	9%
TY helps Students to think for themselves	85%	2%	13%
It enables Students to have a cleared knowledge of their own abilities	83%	2%	15%
It gives Students the opportunity to get a better understanding of the world of work	81%	5%	14%
It increases Students self-confidence	79%	4%	17%
It enables Students to become well balanced people	65%	4%	31%
It enables Students develop better relationships with their teachers	64%	21%	15%
It helps to develop mathematical skills	59%	27%	14%
It improves critical reading skills	54%	24%	22%
It helps Students develop study techniques	52%	21%	27%
It helps Students to play a full and responsible part in their society	50%	24%	16%
It allows Students to engage in drama	48%	31%	21%
It enables records of students work done during the year to be included in a final assessment	48%	33%	19%
It provides Students with the opportunity to engage in language exchange programs	43%	35%	22%
It allows Students to engage more in project work	41%	43%	16%
It allows Students to develop both morally and religiously	35%	38%	27%

In Table 3.2 twenty possible aims are listed. The students were asked how they perceived these aims in order of importance. High on the list of aims perceived to be important were

opportunities to engage in work experience, research possible careers, communicate confidently with others, year free from exam pressures, opportunities to participate in a broad range of subjects and enable them to think for themselves, to develop self confidence and skills.

**Table 3.3: Twenty Most Achieved Aims of TY as perceived by TY students**

<b>Aims</b>	<b>% Achieved</b>	<b>% Not Achieved</b>	<b>% Undecided</b>
It gave Students the opportunity to engage in work experience	96%	1%	3%
It allowed Students the opportunity to participate in a broad range of subjects	90%	4%	6%
It freed Students from exam pressure	87%	7%	6%
It helped Students to develop a broad range of skills, computers, art, crafts etc.	84%	9%	7%
It helped Students communicate more confidently with people	83%	6%	11%
Students got an opportunity to find out about careers	81%	8%	11%
Students engaged in discussion in class	81%	7%	12%
It gave them the opportunity to work in teams	80%	8%	12%
Students engaged in project work	78%	10%	12%
Students found their self-confidence increased	74%	9%	17%
Students had records of their work during the year included in a final assessment	64%	27%	9%
Students developed a scientific mind i.e. an ability to question things	62%	24%	14%
Students assumed responsibility for their own learning	53%	23%	24%
Students developed mathematical skills	53%	35%	12%
Students developed better relationships with their opposite sex	43%	41%	16%
Students were enabled to play a fuller and more responsible part in their society's	41%	37%	22%
Some students engaged in a language exchange programme	33%	57%	10%
It increased some students motivation for learning	30%	46%	24%
Some students developed both morally and religiously	26%	44%	30%
Some students improved their study techniques	20%	62%	18%

Table 3.3 lists the twenty most achieved aims of TY as perceived by the students. The Transition Year Programme is intended to facilitate the development of the intellectual, emotional, spiritual, physical, and vocational capacities of each individual student through structured learning experiences. The present research results show that in the six schools surveyed they are attaining the overall aims of Transition Year Programme as laid down by the Department of Education Guidelines for Schools (1993). The overall Aims are as follows:

*The following aims are inter-related and independent and should be strongly reflected in every TY Programme.*

- 1. Education for maturity with emphasis on personal development including social awareness and increased social competence.*
- 2. The promotion of general, technical and academic skills with an emphasis on inter-disciplinary and self-directed learning.*
- 3. Education through experience of adult and working life as a basis for personal development and maturity.*

#### **4.3.1 Personal development in the Transition Year**

Of the six schools surveyed two offered a separate personal development module within the programme, while in the other four schools it was felt that the whole Transition Year Programme taken as a whole was aimed at the personal development of the students. The programme as a whole was seen to encourage students to acquire a better knowledge of themselves and the society in which they live. It was felt that the students were freed from the constraints of a tightly structured examination system and the students were required to

show commitment, enthusiasm, and to get actively involved in learning. The fact that students were to focus on their own value systems and lifestyles was central to the concept of education for maturity. The students in all six schools were expected to acquire a high degree of social know-how both in relation to their dealings with fellow students and teachers.

In the evaluation report by the Inspectors of the Department of Education (1998-99) they found “that pupils frequently valued the opportunity provided by the Transition Year Programme for personal development”. Work experience and education through the experience of adult and working life also provides a basis for personal development. The Department of Education guidelines (1993) states that suitable cross-curricular learning experiences and a well structured personal education programme where pupils are involved in an active experiential process will help too;

1. *Foster healthy growth and adjustment and effective inter-personal communication and relationships.*
2. *Increase self- knowledge and awareness.*
3. *Develop an understanding and tolerance of others.*
4. *Understand how feelings and attitudes affect behavior.*
5. *Enhance self-concept.*

## **Principal Interviews and Findings**

#### **4.4 Principal Interview Analysis**

The Principal's of each of the six schools were interviewed and taped about issues relating to the Transition Year Programme in their respective schools. The interviews conducted were in line with the aims of the research as outlined in the methodology. The following is a synopsis of the important issues arising out of each interview.

##### **School 1**

The principal of school 1 described his school as a Voluntary Secondary Catholic School with a total current enrollment of 445 boys. He described the educational focus at his school as being predominately academic. In fact, with the exception of Art and Science there were no other practical subjects on offer to the students. Intake to the school is predominantly based on academic criteria. Its ethos is the "Ignatius Ethos" i.e. the spirit of the Jesuits continues to live on. A board of governors runs the school.

Within this school the Transition Year Programme is compulsory. According to the principal, if someone does not want to do Transition Year they must leave the school and go elsewhere. Transition Year is an intrinsic component of a six-year post primary cycle. According to the principal the compulsory nature of Transition Year suits the school and what they want to achieve with their profile of graduate. The Transition Year Programme fits neatly and complements the underlying ethos of the school. There is no request for any additional voluntary contributions from students except in some extraordinary circumstances that come outside the normal planning of Transition Year. Transition Year

is run according to budget and if a particular event takes place outside what is being budgeted for then parents may be asked for additional costs. In general, the programme runs within budget but if a levy is required it is spread over all the pupils in the school i.e. it is in-build into the fee structure of the school. The co-ordinator must apply for and justify his budget annually. The co-ordinator decides how the money is best spent but the senior management group, which incorporates the bursar, headmaster, and assistant headmaster, monitors it.

The principal is very enthusiastic about the ideals of the Transition Year Programme and actively supports the Transition Year Programme by encouraging the co-ordinator, core team, Transition Year teachers and provides them with resources when possible. However, the principal depends to a large extent on the commitment and skills of the co-ordinator and Transition Year teachers for the effective management and implementation of a quality programme. The school does not yet have a 'mission statement' for the Transition Year Programme. The principal said it is not possible to give teachers a choice about teaching the programme. He relates that the strength of the programme is such that it complements the ethos of their school by giving the students a year to mature in a very varied environment. A further strength of the programme is the manner in which the programme is structured i.e. the fact that students have up to four weeks of out of school activities which includes two weeks of work experience, one week of social placement, and a further week of outdoor pursuits. The school has now built in an out-reach programme which operates on Thursday afternoon's where the boys go to institutions to work with people who are handicapped. The Transition Year boys also have a club in the

school where disabled people come in at night and are taught music, art, and computers by the students. This according to the principal is an important part of the pastoral element of the programme.

The main weakness according to the principal of the programme is its reliance on a reasonably stationary stable staff, in that optional subjects offered are based on the skills of the particular teachers involved and some of these programmes have been running for over thirteen years. A further weakness of the course is the absence of practical subjects with the exception of art. Presently according to the principal they struggle with certification and evaluation of the programme is poor.

The Transition Year co-ordinator, senior management and a support team of four teachers are responsible for the majority of the decision-making processes in relation to the programme. Teachers are not allowed timetabled planning time with the exception of the co-ordinator. The co-ordinator and team meet the Transition Year students every Monday morning at 10 am for a class period wherein the co-ordinator addresses all kinds of issues relation to the Transition Year Programme. It is also seen as an opportune time for the head master or assistant head master to address the group on particular issues that arise in relation to the programme. Teacher time planing is entirely based on the good will of teachers.

The themes for Transition Year revolve around responsibility and maturity, which are emphasized again and again. The students are expected to take responsibility for all

aspects of their behaviour, organization, and responsibilities. The Transition Year Programme is not evaluated qualitatively in that no questionnaires are given out and no survey concerning the overall well being of the programme is carried out. The only evaluation is where the co-ordinator would sit down with the management team and discuss issues such as timing of work experience, social placement, exchange programme, and ways of strengthening the programme.

According to the principal the co-ordinator must have good leadership skills, good interpersonal skills, good enough to be firm in their demands of fellow colleagues, but at the same time not to be over demanding. The co-ordinator will be a well-organized person and respected by the pupils, established teachers. The co-ordinator will be motivated by the ideals of TY, able to multi task, organize buses and money.

## **School 2**

School 2 is a Community College. It has a present enrolment of 832 pupils. The pupils consist of a mix of 60 % boys and 40 % girls. It is situated in suburban Dublin in an area, which is undergoing rapid change. 66% of the students come from private housing while 34% of the students come from local authority houses. This ratio is changing all the time. With an increased influx of upwardly mobile families into the area, the area is becoming more mixed. It is particularly noticeable that a greater number of students are coming from families of unsettled marital backgrounds according to the principal. In terms of mix of ability the College would have a cross section of students. According to the principal the educational focus is a mixture of both academic and vocational. Emphasis is placed

on a comprehensive mixture between the old style technical approach and the academic approach to education. The principal described the ethos of the school as one of caring and support, and the provision of guidance in terms of enabling them to get the best possible start in life and helping them to achieve to their ability bearing in mind increasing social problems that exist today. The principal was enthusiastic about the Transition Year in his school.

Transition Year at the College is compulsory for those who do not do L.C.A. The students who take L.C.A., have done Junior Certificate and do not see themselves going into any form of third level education. All the remaining students do Transition Year. A voluntary contribution of £80 is requested from the students. Approximately 80% of the students pay this contribution. The Transition Year cohort are a homogeneous group who are looking to achieve well in their Leaving Certificate and go on to some form of third level education. The principal feels by having compulsory Transition Year it is possible to give them the breadth of curriculum required today. By having TY compulsory it is possible to provide the range of activities and challenges that will actually draw out the individual students. If Transition Year were optional, the principal sees a further problem in trying to integrate two different bodies of students into fifth year. The principal sees a big advantage of the Transition Year in that the students when they enter six-year are less reliant for study purposes on being led and programmed. He feels this stands to them when they go into third level education, they are less likely to drop out.

The principal was very enthusiastic about the ideals and benefits of Transition Year. He sees the TYP as being central to the overall programme of education within the school. He relies very much on the commitment, skills and innovative enterprise of both the co-ordinator and the Transition Year teachers. While no formal 'mission statement' exists for the Transition Year, the principal feels there is great team spirit among the Transition Year teachers and that they in conjunction with the co-ordinator and whole staff had set out clear aims and objectives for the programme. No allowance for remediation exists within the Transition Year Programme for weaker students. Interdisciplinary and cross-curricular approaches to learning do not exist. There is according to the principal a positive orientation towards community services such as helping to care for the handicapped children. Handicapped children were invited to the school he says and allowed to engage in Art classes on one afternoon per week. The Transition Year students were also involved with fund raising for Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children. Throughout the year the students are active in different events such as musicals, drama, debates, foreign exchange programmes. The principal feels third years look forward to many aspects of the TYP. A present weakness of the course is its evaluation. He has decided to address this problem by allocating a teacher to the post of Transition Year Evaluator. The principal is prepared to give whatever time it takes for proper evaluation involving all the staff.

In relation to assessment within the Transition Year Programme, the principal says that individual teachers use a variety of appropriate modes and techniques of assessment to complement the variety of approaches to teaching and learning that exists within the programme.

In relation to implementing and supporting the programme he feels its origin and development have been organic, it has grown from a well-planned pre implementation year. Each department from within the school is encouraged to develop innovative programmes which will help to both equip the students for their Leaving Certificate and will at the same time be both challenging and creative for them. Individual teachers in the school are given every opportunity to teach the Transition Year Programme. Teachers within the school opt to teach the programme themselves i.e. there is no compulsion on any teacher to teach the TYP unless they so wish. All planning in relation to the Transition Year Programme is carried out in consultation with the whole staff. He sees his role as leading in a supportive way, giving at all times his assurance to the staff, giving resources where possible, facilitating in-service, encouraging creativity within his staff.

The principal expected that work experience was vital in the overall programme of the Transition Year and said he found it to be beneficial for the students on many fronts.

According to the principal the students within Transition Year had a choice of either engaging in a German Language exchange programme for a two week period or going on a trip to Paris, both events being highly subscribed by the students.

No core team existed and by and large the promotive interest of the Transition Year Programme and curricular changes was left to the co-ordinator and Transition Year teachers. He sees the co-ordinator as a key person in the overall running of the programme. In his opinion the co-ordinator must be a good organizer, forward looking, and possess good relationships with all the Transition Year teachers. The school has very little involvement with parents he says. They are supportive at times as critical friends, transmitting various concerns about the Transition Year Programme.

### **School 3**

School 3 is a Voluntary Secondary all girls convent school under the trusteeship of the Presentation Sisters. It has a present enrolment of 800 girls. The educational focus at the school is mainly academic with most of the students aspiring to go on to third level. The ethos of the school follows very much the Presentation Ethos which has special emphasis on working with the disadvantaged and deprived. There is an open enrolment policy and students do not have to sit an entrance exam. Presently the school is accepting a significant number of non-national pupils who would be a mixture of asylum seekers, refugees, and programme refugees.

Transition Year at the school is compulsory. The principal feels the programme should be compulsory because first of all the programme is interesting and unique and she is in no doubt of its overall benefit to all students. Secondly, when Transition Year was introduced nine years ago it looked as though student numbers in the locality were in decline. Consequently there was concern among the staff in terms of the viability of the

school and of the teachers jobs. Thirdly, the principal is in no doubt that the students in her school who do the Transition Year perform much better in the Leaving Certificate. Lastly she feels from an organizational point of view, it is easier when the programme is compulsory.

A voluntary contribution of £50 is requested from each student. Approximately 50% of the students pay this contribution. The principal is adamant that all this money is spent on the programme directly in various ways e.g. payment for additional teachers, speakers, extra photo coping, educational tours, and other extra expenses.

The principal is enthusiastic about the ideals and benefits of the Transition Year programme but she also feels there is a need to inject some new life into certain areas of the programme. She feels it is important to keep a balance between new subjects, extra curricular activities, and keeping up some organized progression in the girls Leaving Certificate subjects. She is however careful to stress that it should not be an additional year for studying the Leaving Certificate programme.

No formal 'mission statement' exists in relation to the Transition Year programme within the school. Interdisciplinary and cross-curricular approaches to learning do not exist at present. Despite the ethos of the school the students were not involved to any great extent in local community services such as helping the handicapped or poor in their locality. The principal considered work experience to be a vital and valuable element for enabling the students to mature and develop.

Evaluation of the programme with parents, staff and students takes place to some degree but not in an in depth way i.e. no time is allowed for whole staff evaluation of the programme. In relation to decision making processes the principal consults with and receives input from subject departments. Each teacher supplies a written plan for their subject area. The co-ordinator, principal and year head look after other aspects of the programme, no core team exists. In relation to teachers teaching the programme the principal feels because of the compulsory nature of the programme it is not possible to give teachers a choice, but they would however be consulted about preferences. The principal feels the co-ordinator must be committed to the idea of Transition Year, and enthusiastic about it. The co-ordinator must be calm because there is a lot of things happening. There is a need for the co-ordinator to develop good relationships with the staff thereby succeeding in getting the staff to row in and help when needed. The co-ordinator will also have to relate well with the students and at the same time be firm when the need arises. Parents are invited to help with some activities but the principal states that increasingly parents are not available during the day time school hours.

Overall in general the principal is happy with the nature and value of the Transition Year programme and feels it is here to stay in a compulsory nature for the near future.

#### **School 4**

School 4 is an all girls Community School with an enrolment of 712 students. The educational focus at the school is mainly academic. The ethos of the school is one of having Catholic values with emphasis on the development of each student to her potential. Transition Year Programme at the school is offered on an optional basis

resulting from a decision of the staff. The principal is enthusiastic about the ideals and benefits of the Transition Year for some students but she favors the optional nature of the Transition Year Programme because she feels while some students need greater time to grow, others are more focused and want to go directly to fifth year and proceed to their Leaving Certificate. The principal also feels it is important to give students a choice in relation to participating in a Transition Year Programme. Every student gets the opportunity to apply for the programme and acceptance is broadly based on their behavioural record. Difficult students are taken in on a contract basis; they are given up to mid term to prove the programme would be beneficial to them. So the staff have a big say in deciding who partakes in the Transition Year Programme. Transition Year students at the school are very active involving themselves in fashion competitions, drama, mini company, and local charity work. A voluntary contribution of seventy-five pounds per student is requested. This contribution is given by approximately 90% of students. This money is used for buses, tours, and guest speakers. Transition Year at the school does not have any competition from either L.C.A. or L.C.V.P. In this regard the principal feels the school cannot be everything to every body.

In relation to teaching the Transition Year Programme the staff have a choice. However there are times when it is not possible to run the programme without specialist teachers in which case the principal consults with and requests a teacher to teach the programme. The principal feels it is important to consult with and work with her teachers in all matters relating to the Transition Year Programme. The co-ordinator is largely responsible for planning with the principal. However if time is needed in order to involve

the whole staff on issues relating to the programme then this time is given at the request of the co-ordinator. There is no Transition Year Core Team as such. The programme is evaluated at the end of the year when all the teachers get together to discuss what went well and what did not go well. Students are given a questionnaire to fill out and any issues arising are discussed. The staff pool this information together and an attempt is made to improve the course for the following year. No formal 'mission statement' exists and also interdisciplinary and cross-curricular approaches do not exist. The students are not involved to any great extent in their local community services such as helping the handicapped or the poor in their locality. The principal excepted that work experience was a vital element in the overall programme of Transition Year. No special remediation exists for weaker students in Transition Year.

Parents do not have any say in issues relating to the curriculum; occasionally they are involved in giving talks. The principal attributes the success of the Transition Year mainly to a good co-ordinator who can inspire fellow teachers and who in turn supports the co-ordinator. Good support from management across the school is another important factor in its success. The principal feels her role is very much a supportive one and she feels it's important to affirm her staff at every opportunity. She also feels that because of the poor financial support given by the Department of Education and the large pupil teacher ratio are impediments to the development of the programme. In her opinion the co-ordinator must be a good communicator, good team worker, have good people skills, and leadership qualities.

## **School 5**

School 5 is a Catholic Voluntary all boys Secondary School with a present enrolment of 715 students. The education focus at the school is both academic and vocational, producing students who are both able to succeed to third level, or go straight to work. The ethos of the school is derived from the fact that it is a Catholic School where both students, teachers, and visitors to the school feel welcomed, at home, happy, loved and appreciated in the environment they are participating in. The students are expected to embrace this Catholic and Christian culture to which they are exposed. The educational priority is to a holistic approach to the development of the students so that at the end of the day they are able to take their place in society, have a purpose in life, be good citizens, and people who will eventually give good leadership. Despite the schools educational priority Transition Year at the school is optional with the total enrolment of 48 pupils. Originally there were 70 students. The principal feels the reason for the drop in numbers is due to the growth in the Celtic Tiger economy. Because there is plenty of work available, many students want to get out of school as fast as possible.

The selection of candidates takes place first of all by inviting the parents of third year students to an information night at the school. The benefits of the programme are outlined to the parents and the students are then given the opportunity to apply for the course where the final selection is made by interview. There is a voluntary contribution of £80. 95% of the students contribute. This money goes to insure that the programme is well run and has plenty of variety. The principal stresses that the financial support from the Department of Education is inadequate. Most of the voluntary contribution goes on

organizing tours, guest speakers, and extra curricular activities. How this money is spent is at the discretion of the co-ordinator. In relation to the decision-making processes, all teachers are involved and they meet about six times per year to plan and organize issues in relation to the programme. All the teachers discuss new courses and an effort is constantly made to introduce new courses to the programme. The programme is evaluated towards the end of the academic year whereby all the teachers spend half a day planning and discussing the following years programme.

The principal is enthusiastic about the benefits and value of the Transition Year Programme and he attributes the success of the programme in the school to a “very enthusiastic bunch of teachers”. The school has its own ‘mission statement’ for the Transition Year Programme. Aims of the programme are clearly stated and every effort is made to achieve those aims by confronting the students with many different learning opportunities and high expectations. Interdisciplinary and cross-curricular approaches to learning do not exist at present. Despite the ethos of the school the students were not involved to any great extent in local community services such as helping the handicapped or poor in their locality. The principal considered work experience to be a vital and valuable element for enabling the students to mature and develop.

The principal attributes the success of the programme to a co-ordinator, who is enthusiastic and relates well to the students, is organized, and able to work well with fellow teachers, the principal, keeps parents informed, is aware of new opportunities, has plenty of humanity, and is able to encourage others.

## **School 6**

School 6 is a co-educational V.E.C. School with an enrolment of 750 pupils. The education focus of the school is a mixture of both academic and vocational. The fundamental ethos of the school is based on keeping both students and teachers happy. If the students are happy they learn well. If the staff are happy they work hard. The principal feels that with a good team spirit in the staff room, and if a good spirit exists among the students you have an environment conducive to learning. Transition Year at the school is optional with the total enrolment of 44 students. The programme is offered to all students and the final selection is based on interview and consultation with teachers. A voluntary contribution exists of £200 per student. 95% of the students contribute. The main costs are involved in transport, extra curricular activity, and payment for part time teachers.

In relation to teachers teaching the programme, the principal says there is an element of choice. Some teachers are happy and content working with the Transition Year Programme. The principal is adamant that he would prefer to see teachers who were already teaching higher level courses to Leaving Certificate students putting all their energies into those classes rather than into Transition Year classes. Because the Transition Year Programme is a non-prescribed programme, one has to be innovative and moving forward. It is necessary to have a team of teachers in place that can adjust, update, and redefine the objective of the Transition Year. This takes a lot of effort and because of this effort the principal tends to rotate his teachers, which results in new ideas and new approaches to the programme. The principal is critical of the level of support

materials provided by the Department of Education for Transition Year teachers. He compares it with courses like L.C.V.P. where the teachers involved get significant supporting materials and in-service. According to the principal expecting teachers to come up with their own resources is fine in theory but fails in practice because of the pressures on teachers due to our exam orientated system of education.

Interdisciplinary and cross-curricular approaches to learning do not exist at present. Despite the ethos of the school the students were not involved to any great extent in local community services such as helping the handicapped or poor in their locality. The principal considered work experience to be a vital and valuable element for enabling the students to mature and develop.

In relation to planning and decision making the principal does not get involved. This is left to the co-ordinator and the core team who are formally time tabled for one period per week. Should further time be required for planning then informal arrangements exist. The skills he sees as being important for the co-ordinator are ones of flexibility, good working relationships with colleagues, a person who can source and develop innovative programs.

## **Chapter 5. Influence of Leadership Style**

## **5.1 Leadership Style**

In the past the good principal was accredited with running a “tight ship”. He was the guarantor of good quality education and saw to it that the curriculum as laid down by the Department of Education was fully implemented. In the past the tradition of the autonomous principal was very strong. Today, however, the principal in addition to being responsible for the schools activities, must be able to lead, manage, develop the school, and promote educational change. His/her task today has become more complex and demanding.

The present research shows that the type of leadership exercised by the principals had an enormous effect on the nature, implementation, and running of the Transition Year programme. While the present research did not attempt to collect specific data about their leadership styles it non the less became evident from the researcher’s discussions with the principals and from the information collected from the Transition Year teachers and co-ordinators about issues relating to planning, staffing, implementing, and evaluating the programme that different styles of leadership emerged across the six different schools. It is the author’s view that implementing, organising, and evaluating a programme such as Transition Year calls for transformational leadership skills as opposed to transactional leadership skills.

The principal with transformational leadership style skills allows space and time for his/her teachers to regularly engage in professional discourse and collegial processes.

Hargreaves (1995-97) lists the many spin offs of the transformational leader as follows:

*“A culture of trust develops in which teachers pool resources and celebrate and affirm the success of colleagues, teacher morale is boosted, duplication of effort is eliminated, risk taking in pedagogy, and class room interaction is encouraged, teacher resolve becomes strengthened, it becomes acceptable for teacher-insecurities and vulnerabilities to be shared and aired among colleagues, teachers are supported through the various cycles and processes of incoming change, group solidarity, and collective professional confidence develop, responsibilities are shared in complementary ways, the teachers sense of efficacy becomes strengthened and teachers become involved in decisions that impact on them”.*

Whether teachers regard their principal as transformational or as transactional leaders, whether they evaluate them as participative or autocratic has implications for the success of an innovative programme such as Transition Year.

During the past decade schools in Ireland have been faced with fundamental changes in areas such as curriculum development, teachers roles, and learning styles. These changes have brought a shift in the philosophy that dominated the realm of educational leadership. Those fundamental changes of the past decade calls for a leadership style where the principal is expected to bring visionary leadership to his school, and use a wide range of mechanisms to motivate and activate staff to bring about changes in their school culture. Silins H. C. (1994) indicates that transformational leadership “ bonds leaders and

followers within a collaborative process and this contributes to the performance of the whole organisation. Transactional leadership on the other hand does not bind leaders and followers in an injuring way, therefore it results in a routinized non creative but stable environment as compared to the responsive and innovative environment that the transformational leadership brings about”.

It follows therefore that a thriving, evolving, innovative programme such as Transition Year relies greatly on the transformational leadership style of the principal.

Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) identified six main characteristics of principals who exercised transformational leadership.

1. *Building a school vision and goals.*
2. *Providing intellectual stimulation.*
3. *Offering individualised support.*
4. *Symbolising professional practices and values.*
5. *Demonstrating high performance expectations.*
6. *Developing structures to foster participation in school decisions.*

Kottamp, Mulhern, Hoy (1987) state that “in an open climate where principals are perceived as democratic managers who maintain open channels of communication with the staff, teachers are more satisfied with their jobs compared to schools where the principals exhibited a harsh and authoritative attitude”.

From the author’s discussions with his colleagues, he forms the opinion that teachers get greater satisfaction from their work when they perceive their principal as someone who

shares information readily, delegates authority, and keeps open channels of communication with his or her teachers at all times. Commitment to the school as an organisation comes from commitment to programmes such as Transition Year which in turn comes from teacher's satisfaction with their roles. It is the principal who is responsible for encouraging this commitment across the school.

Gay (1995) reveals that 'the most effective teachers put great emphasis on their student-teacher relationships'. This sentiment concurs with the findings of this thesis. Again it is the researchers opinion that teachers who are given the opportunity to take part in the decision-making processes within the school will feel more involved and committed to their students. The transformational leader empowers teachers with a sense of self-esteem, provides them with an opportunity for self development, gives them a feeling of success by allowing them have a say in what goes on in their schools.

## **5.2 In-service Training for Principals in Sweden**

Sweden appears to have a very interesting National Training Programme for principals, which has been running for more than twenty years. Johansson (2001) informs us that there are four steps involved in training principals.

- 1. There is a recruitment-training programme for people who want to become principals. This training gives participants a broad view of different school leadership functions and also retains a focus on the National goals of education.*

2. *There is an introductory training programme for new principals during their first year in office. The main part of this education focuses on the practical and administrative tasks of the principal. The principal is also introduced to pedagogical leadership.*
3. *A National principals training programme is followed by all principals who have been in office for about two years. This programme lasts for two years and involves thirty seminar days. The purpose of this training is to deepen the principal's knowledge and increase their understanding of the National school system, the National goals for the school, and the role of the school in society and the local community.*
4. *University courses are offered for principals who want to continue with school leadership programs.*

Changing the role of the principal is not an easy task. The tradition of the autonomous principal and teacher is still very strong in Ireland. Much can be learned from the Swedish system as outlined above. Our highly centralised and exam oriented system of education makes it very difficult for teachers, parents, or others to influence processes at local school level. The training programme in Sweden for principals is based on a holistic view of the school. The training emphasises a capacity for reflection, for critically processing information and solving problems. The training is based on a view of leadership in the school, which will promote a working climate inspired by openness, reflection, and learning.

In Ireland today there are greater demands on principals, their workload has increased, changes in family patterns, and social conditions of students have added to this workload. They have less time for assessing school quality; administration and financial constraints are inhibitors. To be able to lead teachers the principal has to adjust his or her style of leadership from a practical style to a learning style. To be a learning leader principals require the type of support and in-service that the Swedish system has to offer.

**Chapter 6. Summary of Emerging Issues,  
Discussion and Recommendations for Further  
Study**

## **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter contains a discussion on the key significant findings which emerged from the research on co-ordinators, teachers, students and principals in relation to the Transition Year Programmes on offer in their respective schools. The chapter will also highlight some limitations of the study and offer possible recommendations for further study.

## **6.2 Co-ordinator Findings**

The research showed clearly that there was a high rate of turnover of co-ordinators. 67% of the co-ordinators held the position for a 1-2 year period only, while only 33% of co-ordinators remained in the position for more than 4 years. The overall effect of this may be beneficial for the programme as it ensures that there is a constant input of fresh, new innovative thinking into the programme. However it could also be seen that such a programme with a high turn over of coordinates is disruptive, which in turn could impede the projected development of the programme. All the co-ordinators surveyed stated that the list of rigors and demands of the job of co-ordinator are exhaustive. There was general agreement among all the co-ordinators that their job involved responsibilities such as day to day running of the programme, organising and planning regular meetings, being involved in out of school activities such as work experience, keeping principal and staff informed of the development within the programme, involvement with end of year evaluation and graduation. So perhaps the high turn over of co-ordinators could reflect

the rigors and demands of the job. Amazingly despite these rigors and high demands all of the co-ordinators said they enjoyed the challenges that came with their job.

The principals in the six schools when interviewed were unanimous about the requisite skills and attributes required of a co-ordinator. According to the principals the co-ordinator must have good leadership skills and good interpersonal skills. They must be well organised, respected by both students and fellow teachers. They must be motivated by the ideals of the Transition Year Programme and be able to multitask.

The co-ordinator research showed that in all schools the co-ordinator held either an 'A' post or a 'B' post of responsibility. 66% of co-ordinators held a 'B' post while 33% held an 'A' post. In schools where the Transition Year was compulsory it was usual for the co-ordinator to have an 'A' post of responsibility.

In relation to facilities available to the co-ordinator the research showed that only 50% of co-ordinators had an office or computer at their disposal, while only 33% had the use of their own phone, however all co-ordinators had secretarial services available to them. Co-ordinators should have good facilities available to them so as to enable them to do the best job possible.

The research showed clearly that responsibility for planning laid greatly with the principal, co-ordinator, Transition Year teachers and Core Team, but when it came to

making decisions about changes in the curricula the co-ordinator, Transition Year teachers and Core Team were more involved than the principal, year head or whole staff.

The research identified that while school leaders agree that internal evaluation is a vital annual task. However evaluation was found to be in need of further development in all of the six schools. Schools need a minimum of one full staff day in order to evaluate properly the Transition Year Programme. The results showed principals were reluctant to give this amount of time to evaluation. This shows a shortfall between aspiration and practice. This brings into question their commitment to the ideals of the Transition Year Programme in relation to the school as a whole.

According to the co-ordinators in all six schools the role of the principal was seen to be pivotal in insuring the overall success of the Transition Year Programme within the school. The research showed that in relation to co-ordinators, empowerment processes were widely promoted in a variety of ways, especially in relation to planning, organising and implementing the Programme.

In relation to the co-ordinator age profile the results showed that the age profile of co-ordinators was heavily skewed towards the upper age profile cohorts i.e. all the co-ordinators were above thirty years of age. This brings into question why the position of co-ordinator is not held by younger teachers. A possible reason for this is the number of years young teachers are required to teach before they become post holders.

There was almost equal reliance by the co-ordinators on Aims as laid down by the Department of Education, the Transition Year Folder, the Transition Year Support Team and provision of in-service as aids for implementing and running the Transition Year Programme. It was encouraging to find that all the co-ordinators had received in-service training of some kind from the Transition Year Support Team but it was discouraging to find that 50% of co-ordinators were dissatisfied with the extent of in-service provision.

In relation to the gender profile of co-ordinators 67% were female while 33% were male. The average reduction in teaching hours for co-ordinators was four hours, which according to the co-ordinators was grossly inadequate in order to meet the demands of the job.

Co-ordinators in all six schools were responsible for organising work experience, which varied from two weeks to four week across the six schools. All co-ordinators provided the primary source for initial information about the Transition Year Programme to the parents by inviting them to information evenings in their respective schools.

### **6.3 Teacher Findings**

I am in no doubt that the presence of the Transition Year Programme in a school curriculum enriches the work of teachers and gives them the opportunity to 'try out' new approaches and gain new ideas on the perspectives of their work. For teachers the Transition Year Programme exhibits changes not only in content but also in methodology and assessment procedures. It is clear from the results that teachers will embrace changes

in practice and new methodologies within programmes such as the Transition Year Programme with openness if they feel that a climate exists in their school which is conducive to team work, empowerment and evaluation. We need only to look at the six different magnificent programmes designed and organised by the teachers themselves to know that teachers are not a stumbling block in implementing programmes such as the Transition Year Programme. However, the results show that implementing and running an innovative programme such as Transition Year only places additional work loads on teachers which leads to additional stress if critical support systems are not in place. This supports the literature claims of Fullan and Hargreaves on change as described in chapter one.

In relation to teacher age profile the research shows an interesting trend v.i.z. 76% of teachers teaching the Transition Year Programme in the six schools surveyed are above the age of twenty-nine while 23% of teachers are below the age of twenty-nine. Perhaps a possible reason for this trend is that the more experienced teachers welcome the opportunity for engaging in real curriculum reform within their schools. They are possibly attracted to the nature of the Transition Year Programme and it possible that they view it as a challenge in the context of their teaching. On the other hand the younger cohort of teachers may feel they need space and time to develop the skills, confidence and knowledge required for designing and evaluating their own programmes. The research shows that contrary to what many would expect the older teachers are more willing to take risks with curriculum change.

The results revealed that 80% of the teachers surveyed have been teaching the Transition Year Programme for more than six years while 20% of the teachers have been teaching the Transition Year Programme for less than six years. This suggests that once teachers start teaching the Programme they have a preference to continue teaching the Programme.

In relation to teachers teaching the Transition Year Programme, 86% of the teachers said they had a choice of teaching in the Transition Year Programme. Their decision to teach the programme was arrived at after consultation with the principal. This means that 14% of the teachers surveyed were required to teach the course without consultation. One can understand if the reason for this 'non choice' was due to a shortage of specialised teachers required to teach the Programme. However, if teachers are forced to teach the Transition Year Programme against their wishes then I feel this would have inevitable effects on the outcome i.e. both the quality of commitment and nature of the Transition Year Programme on offer to the students in some schools.

Interestingly 86% of the teachers surveyed said they had changed their teaching practices while in 14% of cases no change occurred in teaching practices. When teaching Transition Year students this result poses the question as to whether this 14% of teachers who did not change their teaching practices were the same 14% of teachers who were forced to teach the Programme. Within the constraints of time it was not possible to further explore and research this issue. Interestingly a high percentage of the students (75.6%) observed changes in the teaching practices of their teachers.

The survey showed that 80% of the teachers surveyed said that the relationships with their students had changed for the better. One of the aims of teachers with regards to students was to give them more freedom and they felt this was possible due to the absence of a state examination at the end of the year. Teachers felt that within the Transition Year Programme it was possible to give the students more opportunities to be responsible for their own learning and to show and exercise leadership qualities within the classroom. It is interesting to compare this figure of 80% with the smaller but significant figure of 64% of students who felt their relationships with their teachers had changed for the better.

In relation to in-service for teaching the Transition Year Programme the results showed that 53% of the teachers surveyed did not receive in-service of any kind. Teachers become angry and frustrated when support systems are inadequate and when in-service training is badly planned or non-existent. Part of the school culture today is often one of an overload mentality among teachers. This is inevitable when teachers are expected to design and implement programmes such as the Transition Year without appropriate focus on in-service. It was widely expected that the in-service aspect of the Transition Year Programme is quite inadequate and has remained so since the introduction of the Transition Year Programme. This failure on behalf of the Department of Education indicates a lack of real concern to implement quality Transition Year Programmes. Models of in-service need to be introduced in all subject areas in order to provide continuing support for the teachers as they develop new skills in their classrooms. The

importance assigned to methodology, teaching skills and personal development must be stressed by giving the teachers proper in-service training courses. The provision of greater staff development and support will be crucial for the further development of the Transition Year Programme. Lack of adequate investment in in-service has killed many an innovation in the past. The underlying value of teacher development emphasis the fundamental belief that the Transition Year Programmes in schools will not improve unless teachers get more support and more encouragement to take risks and make changes to their teaching practice.

The result shows that the 67% of the teachers surveyed never had the opportunity to avail of the supports of the Transition Year Support Team. The challenge here is for the Transition Year Support Team to reach this 67% of teachers in order to improve the quality of their teaching and ultimately the quality of learning involved for the students. Interestingly all of the 33% of teachers who got support from the T.Y.S.T. and T.Y.C.S.S. found the support to be good. The result points out that the quality of the support service's in-service is not an issue but what is an issue is the accessibility to those supports for so many teachers.

In relation to teachers views on having the opportunity to plan their own programmes the following results emerged from the research:

- 90% of the teachers surveyed found that planning their own programmes was both challenging and pleasant change from teaching mandated programmes.

- 77% of teachers agreed that in planning their own programmes, teamwork was encouraged.
- 53% of teachers are dissatisfied with resources/materials at their disposal for teaching the Transition Year Programme.
- 37% of teachers found that planning their own programmes was either difficult or a nuisance.

In relation to collaborative processes, 63% of the teachers surveyed said they were involved in collaborative processes. This collaboration leads to better decisions, higher quality and more satisfied students. Individual teachers are least likely to come in contact with new ideas if they are restricted to their classrooms and have no network of on going professionally based interaction both with their fellow teachers and with teachers from other schools. Teachers really want to hear from other teachers. Structures should be put in place to facility this interaction. Teacher sharing of expertise and discussion of good practices must be seen as essential and valid aspects of time in school. The allotment of time to promote professional teacher interaction and collaboration with colleagues has to be addressed. In relation to the Transition Year Programme I feel that at least one class period per week should be time tabled and used by teachers for reflection and planning in relation to the programme. Today in schools teachers feel frustrated by time restrictions. From the researchers discussions with the principals it emerged that limited attention was given to individual growth to teachers within their schools. To a large extent teacher development within their schools was seen as being the responsibility of individual teachers and at teacher's own expense.

#### **6.4 Student Findings**

Teaching in Ireland today is still to a large extent content centered rather than student centered. Our students today still feel they are passive recipients of knowledge, which is used to score points in their Leaving Certificate examination. Many of our students today feel they are unable to fit into the system and so they opt out. Schooling is more than instruction. When schooling is effective students are continuously becoming more autonomous learners. This is one of the key aims of the Transition Year Programme.

On analyzing the student's questionnaires it is clear that the majority of students are not in favor of compulsory Transition Year. In the schools where the Transition Year was compulsory an average of 50% of the students felt that the Transition Year should be optional. In the schools where the Transition Year was optional, 89% of the students felt the programme should be optional. Despite the fact that the results showed Transition Year was a worthwhile experience for 68% of the students, the students felt they would have preferred to finish their Leaving Certificate one year earlier. They felt that having to do Transition Year deluded them the opportunity of repeating their Leaving Certificate in the future because of their age. Many more of the students felt by doing Transition Year, they lost the study habits they had acquired for their Junior Certificate other students said they found it difficult to settle into fifth year after having the experience of a pressure-free non-exam oriented year.

In keeping with the research carried out with the teachers on relationship change, 64.3% of the students felt that their relationships with their teachers changed for the better. These results are in keeping with the aims laid down by the Department of Education (1993) and also the results of the Inspectors report carried out for the Department of Education (1998-99) which found that many of the students appreciated the bonding effects of Transition Year Programme on pupil/teacher relationships.

The research shows that 75% of the students surveyed observed changes in the teaching methods of their teachers. This is in line with the expected aims of the Department of Education (1993) as laid down in their guidelines. Where they inform us "that a key feature of Transition Year should be the use of a wide range of teacher/learning methodologies and situations". Teacher methodology then should be such as to promote a more positive and self-confident attitude towards learning among the students.

The research shows that 68% of the students surveyed felt that the Transition Year was a worthwhile experience for them. Despite the fact that no two Transition Year Programmes were the same in the six schools surveyed, it was possible to identify common areas within the programmes, which the students enjoyed most. They all enjoyed the opportunity to go on trips, to get away from the classroom when at all possible. In all six schools surveyed a foreign trip was organised for the students. They all looked forward to this trip very much and enjoyed it. The Transition Year students relished the opportunity to get involved in producing a musical, drama, or play, or getting involved in activities in order to raise funds for charity. They welcomed the opportunity

to listed to different invited guest speakers dealing with every day issues such as drugs, religion, forensic science, nuclear energy, youth leadership, etc. All the students related that they enjoyed and valued the opportunity to participate in the world of work. They felt it helped them to relate to people of whom they had no prior dealings. It also gave them the opportunity to observe work place values in operation. Students also enjoyed the opportunity to do subjects they had not done before such as astronomy, zoology, photography, chess, guitar etc. On the other hand the students surveyed identified aspects of the Transition Year they disliked. They found it had to motivate themselves when it came to learning traditional academic subjects such as Irish, English, Maths and Foreign Languages in the absence of an exam in those subjects. They liked project work but they felt it was over done. Interestingly they disliked situations where teachers were absent, they disliked free classes and situations where insufficient activities were planned for them. These findings are in line with the findings of the Inspectorate of the Department of Education (1998-99) who found that “ students valued the opportunity to be active in a creative way at all times”.

The results shows the type of students most likely to benefit from the Transition Year experience were students who were ambitious, students who would be too young when doing their Leaving Certificate, students who were late developers and finally students who were hard workers and in need of high points for entry to specific courses at third level. The results also showed that the Transition Year benefited lazy students least of all.

In relation to the personal development of the students within the Transition Year the results showed that two of the six schools surveyed, designed their own separate personal development module for the Transition Year Programme. In the remaining four schools it was felt that the Transition Year Programme taken as a whole was aimed at the personal development of students. Thus the programme as a whole was seen to encourage the students to acquire a better knowledge of themselves and the society in which they lived.

When the students were asked to list the most achieved aims of Transition Year, high on their list was the opportunity to engage in work experience, the opportunity to partake in a broad range of subjects, the opportunity to have a year out from exam pressure and develop a broad range of skills e.g. computers, art, craft, photography and lastly to investigate possible future careers. Disappointingly among the least achieved aims were the ability to improve their study techniques and increase student's motivation for learning.

## **6.5 Principal Findings**

All the principals surveyed agreed that they had ultimate responsibility for the impact of Transition Year in their respective schools. The interviews with the principals were conducted not only to find out information about the Transition Year Programmes in their schools but also to cross check and confirm issues, which arose from the co-ordinator, teacher and student questionnaire. All the principals were very clear on the ethos of their respective schools and they all felt a need to reflect this ethos in the nature of the Transition Year Programme offered to their students. However, the interviews revealed

that in five of the six schools surveyed the principals did not have a mission statement for the Transition Year. In other words there was a lack of a sense of vision or mental picture of a preferred future for the Transition Year in their schools.

To my amazement two of the six principals interviewed said the Transition Year Programme was not a priority in relation to the overall programme of education in their schools. One principal said that the only priority that counted in his school was the number of points each of his students got in their Leaving Certificate examinations. The same principal had a policy of not allowing his 'best teachers' teach the Transition Year classes, as he was of the opinion that those 'best teachers' should reserve all their energies for teaching their honours Leaving Certificate classes. Another principal related that he always had two classes comprising of 48 students every year and had no intentions of changing this pattern because from a time tabling point of view two classes worked out well for him. This would lead on to conclude that traditional ways, old habits and corporate cultures established over the years still exist in many cases and are difficult to change.

The principal's role in planning in relation to the Transition Year Programme was found to vary. One would have expected all principals to be actively involved in planning but this was not the case. Five of the six school principals surveyed left issues in relation to planning to the co-ordinator and his or her core team and subject teachers. In general the co-ordinator simply informed the principal on issues relating to planning or changes in

the curricular content of the programme. In this regard those principals saw their role as leading in a supportive way.

All the principals interviewed were dissatisfied with how the Transition Year Programme was evaluated in their schools. It was clear that in most cases the Transition Year Programme would have changed little or none since its induction into the school, i.e. there was little evidence for an agenda to change in order to improve what already existed. In general the principals seemed to accept that providing the Transition Year Programme in their schools was 'ticking over' all was well. The realities in such a situation are that the continuities will be stronger than the changes leading eventually to stagnation at its best of the Transition Year Programme. Contrary to this situation the nature of Transition Year is that it needs constant nurturing.

The majority of the principals surveyed were critical of the level of support offered by the Department of Education. They were of the opinion that more support was needed by way of supplying support materials for all subject teachers. They felt it fell short of what the L.C.V.P. support materials had to offer. In their opinions teachers did not have the time or resources to produce their own materials and were therefore dependent on the availability of materials. They felt the availability of resource material affected greatly the quality of the Transition Year Programme.

Five of the six principals surveyed sought a voluntary contribution from their students. They were critical of the grant provided by the Department of Education and said it was

totally inadequate. Interestingly voluntary contributions ranged from £50 to £200 per student. The principals stressed that all of this money was spent on the Transition Year Programme and how it was spent was at the discretion of the co-ordinator. In general the money was spent on transport costs and photo copying materials.

Where the Transition Year was compulsory the principals said the compulsory nature was necessary to give the breadth of curricula needed today and to expose the students to a range of activities which at the end of the day would draw out the individual talents of the students. One principal felt because of its unique nature and the evidence that students who do Transition Year perform much better in their Leaving Certificate the programme should be compulsory in all schools.

Teachers were not allowed time tabled planning time for planning because of the constraints of the present pupil/teacher ratio on time tabling. Teacher planning time in most cases is based on the good will of teachers, however some principals said if time was urgently needed then time would be found at the request of the co-ordinator to discuss issues relating to the programme. All the principals related that the success of the programme in their schools depended on the enthusiasm of the teachers and co-ordinators who confronted their students with a variety of different learning situations and high expectations from their students.

## **6.6 Overall Key Emerging Issues from the Study**

The following is a list of the major conclusions arising from the research.

1. There was a high turn over of co-ordinators. The majority of co-ordinators held the position for a one to two year period only, possibly reflecting the rigors and high demands of co-ordinating.
2. Good facilities such as office, phone, and computer are necessary in order to do the best job possible.
3. In relation to the overall planning of the programme the principal, co-ordinator, core team and Transition Year teachers were involved, but when it came to making changes in curricula the co-ordinator, core team and Transition Year teachers were more involved than the principal, year head or whole staff. Time tabled planning time was allowed for in only one of the six schools surveyed. In some cases planning meetings were held during lunch hour or after school. These meetings depended solely on the good will of the teachers. In other cases special arrangements were made with the help of the principal.
4. The co-ordinators held responsibility for the day to day organisation of the programme in all six schools. In one school the co-ordinator was given one time tabled period per week which enabled him to meet the entire group for the first period every Monday morning. This worked very well and enabled the co-ordinator to deal with arising issues and keep the group informed about events for the week. It also gave the principal or deputy principal the opportunity to address the group.

5. The research identified the while school leaders agreed that internal evaluation was a vital task, this evaluation was found to be in need of further development in all six schools.
6. Empowerment processes were widely promoted in a variety of ways by the principal especially in relation to planning, organising and implementing the programme.
7. The co-ordinators relied equally on the Department of Education Aims (1993), Transition Year Curriculum Support Services, Transition Year Folder and provision of in-service as aids for implementing and running the Transition Year Programme.
8. While all the co-ordinators surveyed got some training from the TYCSS, 50% of the co-ordinators were dissatisfied with the extent of in-service provision for their positions.
9. It is clear from the research that teachers will embrace changes in practice and new methodologies within programmes such as the Transition Year provided they feel a climate exists in their schools which is conducive to team work, empowerment and evaluation.
10. Research shows that contrary to what many would expect, the older teachers are more willing to take risks with curricular change.
11. 86% of the teachers had the choice of opting to teach the Transition Year Programme while 14% of teachers were required to teach the programme without consolation.

12. 86% of teachers surveyed said they had changed their teaching practices for the better.
13. 80% of teachers said their relationships with their students had changed for the better.
14. 53% of the teachers teaching the TYP did not receive in-service of any kind. This indicates a lack of concern on the part of the Department of Education and Science to implement quality TYP.
15. 67% of teachers surveyed never had the opportunity to avail of the services of TYCSS. The challenge here is for the TYCSS to reach this cohort of teachers.
16. Of the 33% of teachers who did get support from the TYCSS, all the teachers found this support to be good.
17. 90% of the teachers surveyed found that planning their own programmes was both challenging and a pleasant change from teaching mandated programmes.
18. 63% of the teachers presently teaching the TYP are involved in collaborative processes with their colleagues.
19. Teacher development within their schools was seen as being the responsibility of individual teachers and at their own expense.
20. The majority of students surveyed favoured optional Transition Year as opposed to compulsory Transition Year.
21. 68% of students found Transition Year to be a worthwhile experience.

22. 64% of the students felt their relationships with their teachers had changed for the better.
23. 75% of students observed changes in the teaching methods of the teachers.
24. The research showed that Transition Year benefited ambitious and hard working students most of all while lazy students got the least benefit.
25. According to the students surveyed the most achieved aims of the TYP were the opportunities to engage in work experience, to partake in a broad range of subjects, to develop a broad range of skills i.e. computers, art, crafts, photography and finally to investigate possible future careers.
26. Disappointingly according to the students the least achieved aims were the ability to improve their study techniques and increase their motivation for learning.
27. Only one of the six schools surveyed had a 'mission statement' for their Transition Year Programme.
28. In all six schools the principals were enthusiastic about the ideals and benefits of the Transition Year Programme.
29. All principals were critical of the level of support offered by the Department of Education and Science. They felt a grant of £50 per student was totally inadequate.
30. There was a huge variation in the amounts of voluntary contributions requested of students. This ranged from £0 to £200 per student. The amount requested did not reflect in any way the quality of the Transition Year Programme on offer in the schools.

31. All principals related that the success of the programmes in their schools was due to the enthusiasm of the co-ordinator and transition Year teachers who confronted their students with a variety of different learning situations and had high expectations of their students.
32. No allowance for remediation of weaker students existed in any of the six schools.
33. Interdisciplinary and cross curricular approaches to learning did not exist in any of the six schools.
34. In only two schools out of the six surveyed was there a positive orientation towards community services such as helping with the handicapped or poor in their locality.
35. All six principals excepted that work experience was a vital task in the Transition Year Programme and they found it to be beneficial for the students on many fronts.
36. In general the principals saw their role in relation to the Transition Year Programme as leading in a supportive way, giving at all times assurance to their staff, giving resources where possible and encouraging creativity within the staff, however with regard to their role as leaders the research showed that in general principals were not involved with bringing about curricular changes. Surely leadership is about making new roads where none exist and surely TYP offers principals a golden opportunity to make new roads instead of maintaining the roads that already exist.
37. Parental involvement was practically non-existent.

## **6.7 Recommendations for the Transition Year Programme**

1. The myth that Transition Year is a 'doss year' needs to be put to rest.
2. More attention needs to be given to the homework aspect of Transition Year in order to prevent students losing the study techniques developed at Junior Certificate level. Homework should be an opportunity for students to do independent research. This type of homework is of a different format but non-the less it encourages students to sit at a table for an hour or two.
3. The Transition Year Programme needs to be both structured and balanced i.e. there must be a balance between what is entertainment value and educational value.
4. In the area of community service wider links need to be developed with the students locality.
5. Interdisciplinary cross-curricular approaches to teaching are in need of development.
6. Informal networking of schools offering Transition Year in their locality would be an enormous benefit in terms of improving and revitalising individual programmes. Perhaps educational centres could be used more for this purpose.
7. Regular evaluation at least once per term would be advisable.
8. External evaluation in order to enable the programme to evolve and reach its full potential is recommended.

9. Greater parental involvement should be encouraged. Parents should be invited where possible to make their professional expertise available to the school.

### **6.8 Limitations of the Present Study**

1. The student and teacher questionnaires were anonymous, this meant the researcher could not follow up either the teachers or students with an interview in order to check the accuracy and reliability of the data.
2. In relation to the students surveys it was felt that the sample was relatively small but it was as large as possible given the constraints of time and cost for the researcher.
3. The timing of the research would appear to have been another limiting factor. In the researchers opinion it would have been far better to carry out the research in the month of May i.e. at the end of the Transition Year when many of the issues relating to the programme would have fresh in the minds of the students. The research was carried out approximately six months after the students had completed their Transition Year i.e. the students were in fifth year when the survey was carried out and may not have given the questions due consideration.
4. Sampling of the students in each school was done by the co-ordinator, so in this regard the research sample depended the co-ordinator good will.
5. In relation to the principals interviewed, four of the principals were male and two were female. It would have been preferable to have an equal gender balance.

## **6.9 Recommendations for Further Research**

There are extensive areas touched on in this research which could be explored in greater depth. Similarly, similar research in six different schools would throw up interesting comparisons. Furthermore one possible area of research would be to investigate the contribution Transition Year makes to students at third level i.e. to what extent students who have had the experience of Transition Year do well at third level and to what extent students who have not had the experience of Transition Year do not so well.

Another possible area for further research would be to survey the top achievers in the Leaving Certificate Examination in a number of schools and investigate what influence the Transition Year experience had on them.

Another possible area of research would to survey the students in a number of local schools who did not make it to third level in order to investigate what influence the Transition Year experience had for them.

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## **Appendices:**

## Appendix 1. Transition Year Co-ordinator Questionnaire

### Part 1 --- General Information

**Q.1 School Type** (Please tick the appropriate box which describes your school)

- Private Secondary Fee – paying (mixed)
- Community College (mixed)
- Voluntary Secondary School (female)
- Community school (female)
- Voluntary Secondary School (male)
- V.E.C. (mixed)

**Q.2 (a) Age** (Please tick the appropriate box)

21 - 29

30 – 45

Over 45

**(b) Gender** Male

Female

**(c) Number of years teaching**

1-5

6-10

11-20

Over 20

**(d) How long have you been co-ordinating the Transition Year Programme?**

1 - 2yrs

2 - 4yrs

More than 4yrs

**(e) Does your position as Transition Year Co-ordinator carry an "A Post" or "B Post"?**

"A Post"

"B Post"

Neither

**(f) If the answer to (e) is "neither" please indicate how you were selected for the position of co-ordinator.**

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**(g) In what year did your school first offer the Transition Year Programme to its students?**

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**(h) Has there been any period in which your school did not offer the Transition Year Programme to its students since the programme was first introduced to the school?**

**(Please tick the appropriate box)**

Yes

No

**If yes please specify and give reason(s) for such lapse.**

---

(i) How many students are in your Transition Year?

\_\_\_\_\_

(j) How many years approximately has Transition Year been running in your school?

(Please tick the appropriate box)

Less than 5 years

5 – 10 years

More than 10 years

(k) Is Transition Year compulsory or optional in your school?

Compulsory

Optional

(l) Do you think Transition Year should be Optional/Compulsory?

Compulsory

Optional

Please give possible reasons for your choice to the above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Part 2 --- The Transition Year Curriculum

(a) Which of the following senior cycle programmes are on offer in your school?

(Please tick, you may tick more than one.)

LCA

LCVP

Transition Year

**(b) How important would you rate the inclusion of the following topics in a Transition Year Programme? (Please circle the appropriate number)**

**1 = not important    2 = fairly important    3 = very important**

**Topic**

Personal and Social development	1	2	3
Health Education	1	2	3
First Aid	1	2	3
Civic Social and Political Education	1	2	3
Career Guidance	1	2	3
Religion	1	2	3
Philosophy	1	2	3
Physical Education	1	2	3
Leisure Pursuits	1	2	3
Drama	1	2	3
Art	1	2	3
Music	1	2	3

Critical Reading	1	2	3
Photography	1	2	3
Dance	1	2	3
Irish	1	2	3
English	1	2	3
Foreign Languages	1	2	3
Maths	1	2	3
Science	1	2	3
Information Technology	1	2	3
Environmental + Social Studies	1	2	3
Business and enterprise studies	1	2	3
Work Experience	1	2	3
Study Techniques	1	2	3
Self Defense	1	2	3
Learning to Drive	1	2	3
Others (Please Specify)			

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(c) With reference to your own Transition Year Curriculum please indicate the number of periods given to some or all of the topics listed below.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Number of Periods/Week</b>
Personal Social Development	_____
Health Education	_____
First Aid	_____
Civic Social & Political Education	_____
Career Guidance	_____
Religion	_____
Philosophy	_____
Physical Education	_____
Leisure Pursuits	_____
Drama	_____
Art	_____
Music	_____
Critical Reading	_____
Photography	_____
Dance	_____
Irish	_____
English	_____
Maths	_____
Foreign Languages	_____

Science (Physics, Chemistry & Biology modules) \_\_\_\_\_

Information Technology \_\_\_\_\_

Environmental and Social Studies \_\_\_\_\_

Business and Enterprise Studies \_\_\_\_\_

Study Techniques \_\_\_\_\_

Self Defence \_\_\_\_\_

Learning to Drive \_\_\_\_\_

Others (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

(d) Who holds responsibility for making decisions about the curriculum content of the Transition Year Programme in your school? (Please tick the appropriate box, you may tick more than one box.)

- Principal
- Transition Year Head
- Transition Year Co-ordinator
- Whole Staff
- Transition Year Teachers
- Transition Year Core Team
- Parents
- Local Employers
- Others (please specify)

---

**(e)** When changes to curriculum are suggested, where do the suggestions for such changes usually come from. (Please tick the appropriate box you can pick more than one)

- Department of Education
- Principal of School
- Transition Year, Year Head
- Transition Year Co-ordinator
- Transition Year Teacher
- Core Transition Year Team
- Whole Staff
- Parents
- Local Employers
- Others (Please Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**(f)** Was the Transition Year Curriculum re-adjusted in any way since it was first implemented in your school?

Yes  No

If yes please give details \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Part 3 --- Transition Year Support Structures

(a) In relation to the following Transition Year Support Structures, how often do you use them as an aid for helping you to implement the programme? (Please place the appropriate number in the box where **1 = always**    **2 = occasionally**    **3 = never** )

#### Support Structures

- Department of Ed. Aims
- Transition Year Curriculum Support Services
- Transition Year Folder
- In-service provision

(b) In relation to each of the following support structures for Transition Year, please indicate how you would rate your present satisfaction with them by placing the appropriate number in the box where **1 = satisfied and 2 = dissatisfied**.

- Department of Ed. Aims
- Transition Year Curriculum Support Services
- Transition Year Folder
- In-service provision

(c) Do you feel the above levels of support are adequate for implementing and running the Transition Year Programme (Please tick the appropriate box)

Yes  No

If "no", what other supports do you feel would help you as a co-ordinator?

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(d) Did you receive in-service training for the position of the co-ordinator?

Yes   
No

If "yes", please specify the nature of this in-service and by whom it was supplied.

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(e) If the answer to part (d) above is 'yes' specifically how would you rate the training you received in relation to the following areas? Please rate the training by circling the appropriate number where

1= None    2= Poor    3=fair    4=Good    5= Very Good.

**In-service Topic**

Rationale and philosophy for the programme	1	2	3	4	5
Curricular content	1	2	3	4	5
Time Tabling Requirements	1	2	3	4	5

Introducing the Transition Year to parents	1	2	3	4	5
Curricular development and design	1	2	3	4	5
Transition Year assessment procedures	1	2	3	4	5
Transition Year evaluation procedures	1	2	3	4	5
Teamwork Strategies	1	2	3	4	5
Teaching Mythologies	1	2	3	4	5
Organising Work Experience	1	2	3	4	5
Evaluating Work Experience	1	2	3	4	5
Coordinating the programme with fellow teachers	1	2	3	4	5
Programme certification	1	2	3	4	5
Transition Year Graduation	1	2	3	4	5
Others (Please specify)					

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(f) Which of the following facilities do you have in your school to facilitate you as a Transition Year Co-ordinator? ( Please tick )

Office       Computer       Phone   
 Access to secretarial services       None

## Part 4 --- Planning and implementation

(a) In relation to planning your Transition Year Programme, please indicate whether each of the following exists. (Please tick)

	Yes	No
▪ Provision of time-tabled time by the principal for planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Provision of time tabled time for developing new resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Team Teaching	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
▪ Collaborative approaches by teachers for teaching the programme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Engagement of cross curricular activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Opportunities for participating in decision making processes regarding the transition year programme		
1 Co-ordinator	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 Year Head	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Core management team	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 Transition Year teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 Whole Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Opportunities for developing ties with local community and local employers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**(b) Do you have a Transition Year Core Team? \_\_\_\_\_**

**If 'yes', how many members are on this team? \_\_\_\_\_**

**(c) What time allocation/reduction (if any) do you have  
for your co-ordinators work? \_\_\_\_\_**

**(d) What procedures are in place in your school for providing information to parents and  
students about the benefits of doing a transition year programme?**

- Induction night for third year parents
- School Newsletter
- Display of the work carried out by transition years at certain  
times throughout the year
- Others (Please Specify)

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(e) How important are the following features/ factors in implementing the Transition Year Programme at school level?

(Please circle one of the numbers where 1 = important and 2 = unimportant).

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| ▪ Support from the Principle           | 1 | 2 |
| ▪ Support from the other staff members | 1 | 2 |
| ▪ Clear aims the programme             | 1 | 2 |
| ▪ Support of parents                   | 1 | 2 |
| ▪ Attitude of teacher to change        | 1 | 2 |
| ▪ Extra time for planning              | 1 | 2 |
| ▪ Dept. of Education support           | 1 | 2 |
| ▪ Curricular development assistance    | 1 | 2 |
| ▪ In-services training                 | 1 | 2 |
| ▪ Funding                              | 1 | 2 |
| ▪ Others Please specify                |   |   |

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## Part 5 - Work Experience

(a) Is Work Experience part of your Transaction Year Programme?

Yes

No

(b) If the answer to (a) is "yes" please specify the number of weeks you would see as being appropriate.

One week per year

Two weeks per year

Three weeks per year

Four weeks per year

Greater than four weeks per year

(c) Below is a list of some possible aims of a work experience module, please rate in our opinion the benefit of these aims as being either helpful or unhelpful in assisting students to become mature, responsible and caring adolescents.

Please circle the appropriate number where 1 = helpful 2 = unhelpful 3 = not sure

### Aims

- It enables students to learn at first hand about life in the workplace 1 2 3
- It enables students to present themselves appropriately 1 2 3
- It enables students observe work place values in operation 1 2 3
- It enables students to become good time keepers and be punctual 1 2 3

- It enables students to follow instructions given by supervisors 1 2 3
- It enables students to develop good social skills like getting on well with other co workers 1 2 3
- It enables students to deal with people in a caring and friendly way 1 2 3
- It enables students to assume responsibility to organize their own work experience 1 2 3
- It enables students to make informed decisions about future careers 1 2 3
- It extends the learning environment for students 1 2 3

(d) On completion of work experience is it evaluated in any way?

Yes

No

If 'yes', please specify how this is done

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(e) In general how would you rate the quality of their work experience? (Please tick)

Poor

Fair

Good

Excellent

### Part 6 --- Evaluation/Certification

**(a)** Is the transition year programme in your school evaluated in any way?

Yes

No

If 'yes', how often ? (Please tick the appropriate box)

Once per year only

More than once per year

If more than once please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**(b)** If the programme is evaluated who takes part in this evaluation?  
(Please tick, you may tick more than one)

▪ The whole staff

▪ The whole staff with the help of an external evaluator

▪ All transition year teachers

▪ Co-ordinator and core transition year team

▪ External evaluator

▪ Principal only

▪ Others (Please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_

**(c) Briefly state how evaluation is carried out.**

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**(d) Do the students who successfully complete the Transition Year Programme receive a certificate?**

Yes

No

**If 'yes' how is this certification given to the students?**

- Posted home
- Given by the Principal
- Given by the co-ordinator
- Given out at the end of year on graduation night
- Other ( please specify)

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**(e)** On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your satisfaction with the job of co-ordinator?

1 = extremely satisfied

2 = very satisfied

3 = quite satisfied

4 = somewhat dissatisfied

5 = most dissatisfied

**(f)** If you are given advice to someone about to become a Transition Year Co-ordinator,  
what advice would you give them ?

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*Your cooperation and time taken to complete this questionnaire is greatly appreciated. Please seal the completed questionnaire in the envelope provided.*

## Appendix 2. Teacher Questionnaire

**Q. 1** Please tick the appropriate box.

**a) Age**                      21- 29                     

   30-45                     

   Over 45                     

**b) Gender**                      Male                     

   Female                     

**c) Number of Years Teaching**

   1-5 years                     

   6-10 years                     

   Over 10 years                     

**d) How many years have you been teaching the  
Transition Year Programme?**                     

**e) In your school who decides which teachers**

teach the Transition Year Programme  
( Please tick the appropriate box.)

**1) The Principal decides without any consultation**                        
who teaches the Transition Year Programme .

2) The Principal decides with consultation who teaches the Programme .

3) The teacher volunteers to teach the Transition Year Programme .

4) The Transition Year Co-ordinator decides .

**Q.2** When you are teaching Transition Year classes

do you find your teaching methods differ in any way from traditional teaching methods .

*( Please tick the appropriate box )*

Very different

Different

Much the same

No difference

If very different or different is ticked above please

Specify in what ways .

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**b) When you were teaching Transition Year classes did you notice any difference in your relationships with your students .**

Yes

No

**If yes please state in what way those relationships differ and suggest possible reasons for this.**

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**Q.3 Did you as a teacher of Transition Year ever have any opportunity in the past to contribute to the overall planning of the Transition Year Curriculum .**

Yes

No

If yes , please elaborate

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**Q.4 Have you ever received in-service training of any kind in relation to the Transition Year Programme .**

Yes

No

If no, please specify areas you would welcome in-service training in

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**Q.5 Have you ever availed of the services of the Transition**

**Year Curriculum Support Services.**

**(Please tick the appropriate box)**

Yes

No

**If yes in what capacity**

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**How would you rate this support?**

Poor

Fair

Good

Very Good

**Q.6 In relation to planning your own Transition Year**

**Programme , Please circle the appropriate number**

**on each line where**

**1 = Disagree**

**2= Agree**

- I find planning a programme such as Transition Year a pleasant change from teaching mandated programmes . 1 2
- I find planning a programme encourages team Work. 1 2
- I find planning a programme such as Transition Year challenging . 1 2
- I find planning a programme such as Transition Year difficult. 1 2
- I find planning a programme such as Transition Year a nuisance 1 2

**Q.7 Are you satisfied with the materials and resources**

Available for teaching your subject  
*(Please tick the appropriate box)*

Yes

No

If no what extra materials and resources would you like

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**Q.8** In relation to teaching your own subject at Transition Year level, have you in the past worked in collaboration with your colleagues to discuss teaching strategies or best practices?

(Please tick the appropriate box)

Yes

No

If yes please specify in what way (s)

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**Q.9** What are your current feelings on the Transition Year in your school.(Please tick the appropriate box)

Alive and well

Lost some of its momentum

In need of rejuvenation

**Q.10** What advice would you give a fellow teacher contemplating teaching the Transition Year Programme .

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*Thank you very much for your time and co-operation in completing  
this questionnaire. Please place it in the envelope supplied and seal it*

### Appendix 3. Student Questionnaire For Compulsory Transition Year.

**Q.1. Gender** (*please tick the appropriate box*)

Male

Female

**Q.2. Transition Year at your school was compulsory,**

if it had been optional would you have chosen to do

Transition Year?

Yes

No

**Q.3. If the answer to Q.2. is "no", please state why.**

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**Q.4. The following statements reflect some of the aims of Transition Year, please**

indicate the **importance** of each aim.

*(Please circle the appropriate number in your opinion)*

**1 = not important,    2 = important,    3 = hard to say,    4 = very important**

- |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ▪ Increases motivation for learning   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| ▪ Helps you think for yourself  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| ▪ Helps to improve study techniques   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| ▪ Helps you to communicate confidently with other people.                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| ▪ Helps you to develop a broad range of skills eg. computers, cameras, art, crafts and dance. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

▪ Helps you develop into a well balanced person	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you develop relationships with members of the opposite sex.	1	2	3	4
▪ Allows you the chance to participate in a broad range of subjects.	1	2	3	4
▪ Allows you to be free from exam pressure.	1	2	3	4
▪ Increases your self-confidence.	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you work in teams.	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you develop your own interests.	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you to take responsibility for your own learning.	1	2	3	4
▪ Gives you the opportunity to find out about future careers.	1	2	3	4
▪ Gives you the opportunity for work experience.	1	2	3	4
▪ Opportunity to go on school tours.	1	2	3	4
▪ To do language exchange programmes.	1	2	3	4
▪ The opportunity to get a better understanding of the world of work.	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you play a full and responsible part in your society.	1	2	3	4
▪ Help your moral and religious development.	1	2	3	4
▪ Do more project work.	1	2	3	4
▪ Have discussions in class.	1	2	3	4
▪ To engage in drama.	1	2	3	4
▪ To make oral presentations to a group.	1	2	3	4

▪ Helps you make informed decisions about your Leaving Cert.	1	2	3	4
▪ To help you have a clearer knowledge of your own abilities.	1	2	3	4
▪ To have the records of your work done during the year included in a final assessment.	1	2	3	4
▪ To develop better relationships with your teachers.	1	2	3	4
▪ To engage in project work and develop better relationships with your peers.	1	2	3	4
▪ To improve critical reading skills.	1	2	3	4
▪ To develop mathematical skills.	1	2	3	4
▪ To stimulate the development of a scientific mind (i.e. to question things).	1	2	3	4

**Q.5.** In your opinion how well did the Transition Year in your school **achieve** the below aims? (*Please circle the appropriate number*)

**1 = Not achieved at all. 2 = Achieved 3 = Hard to say 4 = Very well achieved**

▪ Increases motivation for learning	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you think for yourself	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps to improve study techniques	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you to communicate confidently with other people.	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you to develop a broad range of skills eg. computers, cameras, art, crafts and dance.	1	2	3	4

▪ Helps you develop into a well balanced person	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you develop relationships with members of the opposite sex.	1	2	3	4
▪ Allows you the chance to participate in a broad range of subjects.	1	2	3	4
▪ Allows you to be free from exam pressure.	1	2	3	4
▪ Increases your self-confidence.	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you work in teams.	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you develop your own interests.	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you to take responsibility for your own learning.	1	2	3	4
▪ Gives you the opportunity to find out about future careers.	1	2	3	4
▪ Gives you the opportunity for work experience.	1	2	3	4
▪ Opportunity to go on school tours.	1	2	3	4
▪ To do language exchange programmes.	1	2	3	4
▪ The opportunity to get a better understanding of the world of work.	1	2	3	4
▪ Help you play a full and responsible part in your society.	1	2	3	4
▪ Help your moral and religious development.	1	2	3	4
▪ Do more project work.	1	2	3	4
▪ Have discussions in class.	1	2	3	4
▪ To engage in drama.	1	2	3	4
▪ To make oral presentations to a group.	1	2	3	4

▪ Helps you make informed decisions about your Leaving Cert.	1	2	3	4
▪ To help you have a clearer knowledge of your own abilities.	1	2	3	4
▪ To have the records of your work done during the year included in a final assessment.	1	2	3	4
▪ To develop better relationships with your teachers.	1	2	3	4
▪ To engage in project work and develop better relationships with your peers.	1	2	3	4
▪ To improve critical reading skills.	1	2	3	4
▪ To develop mathematical skills.	1	2	3	4
▪ To stimulate the development of a scientific mind (i.e. to question things).	1	2	3	4

**Q.6.** Who do you think benefits most from the Transition year in your school.  
(Please tick the appropriate box; you may tick more than one box.)

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1.) Those who don't do well in the Junior Cert.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2.) Students who would be too young doing Leaving Cert.                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3.) Everyone who does it.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4.) Lazy students.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5.) Ambitious students.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6.) Students who are late developers.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7.) Students who are hard workers.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8.) Students who want to get high points for entry into a specific course at university. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Q.7. a) What aspects of transition year did you enjoy most?**

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**b) What aspects of transition year did you enjoy least?**

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**Q.8. a). What subject(s) did you like most and why?**

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**b). What subject(s) did you least most and why?**

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**Q.9. Did you notice any difference in the relationships between yourself and your teachers?**

Yes

No

If yes, please specify.

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**Q.10.** Did you notice any difference in your teachers approach to teaching your lessons?

Yes

No

If yes, please specify how it differed.

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**Q.11.** In your opinion was your overall experience or Transition Year worthwhile?

Yes

No

**Q.12.** If you had the choice what changes would you make to the Transition Year

Programme in order to make it more interesting for students.

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**Appendix 4. Student Questionnaire For Optional Transition Year.**

**Q.1. Gender** *(please tick the appropriate box)*

Male

Female

**Q.2. Transition Year at your school was optional; do you think it should be compulsory?**

Yes

No

**Q.3. If the answer to Q.2. is "no", please state why.**

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**Q.4. Why did you choose to do Transition year instead of going straight into 5<sup>th</sup> Year?**

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**Q.5.** The following statements reflect some of the aims of Transition Year, please

Indicate the **importance** of each aim.

*(Please circle the appropriate number in your opinion)*

**1 = not important,    2 = important,    3 = hard to say,    4 = very important**

- |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ▪ Increases motivation for learning   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| ▪ Helps you think for yourself  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| ▪ Helps to improve study techniques   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| ▪ Helps you to communicate confidently with other people.                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| ▪ Helps you to develop a broad range of skills eg. computers, cameras, art, crafts and dance. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| ▪ Helps you develop into a well balanced person   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| ▪ Helps you develop relationships with members of the opposite sex.                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| ▪ Allows you the chance to participate in a broad range of subjects.                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| ▪ Allows you to be free from exam pressure.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| ▪ Increases your self-confidence.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| ▪ Helps you work in teams.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| ▪ Helps you develop your own interests.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| ▪ Helps you to take responsibility for your own learning.                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| ▪ Gives you the opportunity to find out about future careers.                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| ▪ Gives you the opportunity for work experience.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

▪ Opportunity to go on school tours.	1	2	3	4
▪ To do language exchange programmes.	1	2	3	4
▪ The opportunity to get a better understanding of the world of work.	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you play a full and responsible part in your society.	1	2	3	4
▪ Help your moral and religious development.	1	2	3	4
▪ Do more project work.	1	2	3	4
▪ Have discussions in class.	1	2	3	4
▪ To engage in drama.	1	2	3	4
▪ To make oral presentations to a group.	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you make informed decisions about your Leaving Cert.	1	2	3	4
▪ To help you have a clearer knowledge of your own abilities.	1	2	3	4
▪ To have the records of your work done during the year included in a final assessment.	1	2	3	4
▪ To develop better relationships with your teachers.	1	2	3	4
▪ To engage in project work and develop better relationships with your peers.	1	2	3	4
▪ To improve critical reading skills.	1	2	3	4
▪ To develop mathematical skills.	1	2	3	4
▪ To stimulate the development of a scientific mind (i.e. to question things).	1	2	3	4

**Q.6.** In your opinion how well did the Transition Year in your school **achieve** the below aims? (*Please circle the appropriate number*)

**1 = Not achieved at all. 2 = Achieved 3 = Hard to say 4 = Very well achieved**

▪ Increases motivation for learning	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you think for yourself	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps to improve study techniques	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you to communicate confidently with other people.	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you to develop a broad range of skills eg. computers, cameras, art, crafts and dance.	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you develop into a well balanced person	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you develop relationships with members of the opposite sex.	1	2	3	4
▪ Allows you the chance to participate in a broad range of subjects.	1	2	3	4
▪ Allows you to be free from exam pressure.	1	2	3	4
▪ Increases your self-confidence.	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you work in teams.	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you develop your own interests.	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you to take responsibility for your own learning.	1	2	3	4
▪ Gives you the opportunity to find out about future careers.	1	2	3	4
▪ Gives you the opportunity for work experience.	1	2	3	4
▪ Opportunity to go on school tours.	1	2	3	4

▪ To do language exchange programmes.	1	2	3	4
▪ The opportunity to get a better understanding of the world of work.	1	2	3	4
▪ Help you play a full and responsible part in your society.	1	2	3	4
▪ Help your moral and religious development.	1	2	3	4
▪ Do more project work.	1	2	3	4
▪ Have discussions in class.	1	2	3	4
▪ To engage in drama.	1	2	3	4
▪ To make oral presentations to a group.	1	2	3	4
▪ Helps you make informed decisions about your Leaving Cert.	1	2	3	4
▪ To help you have a clearer knowledge of your own abilities.	1	2	3	4
▪ To have the records of your work done during the year included in a final assessment.	1	2	3	4
▪ To develop better relationships with your teachers.	1	2	3	4
▪ To engage in project work and develop better relationships with your peers.	1	2	3	4
▪ To improve critical reading skills.	1	2	3	4
▪ To develop mathematical skills.	1	2	3	4
▪ To stimulate the development of a scientific mind (i.e. to question things).	1	2	3	4

**Q.7.** Who do you think benefits most from the Transition year in your school.  
(Please tick the appropriate box; you may tick more than one box.)

1.) Those who don't do well in the Junior Cert.

2.) Students who would be too young doing Leaving Cert.

3.) Everyone who does it.

4.) Lazy students.

5.) Ambitious students.

6.) Students who are late developers.

7.) Students who are hard workers.

8.) Students who want to get high points for entry  
into a specific course at university.

**Q.8. a)** What aspects of transition year did you enjoy most?

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**b)** What aspects of transition year did you enjoy least?

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**Q.9. a). What subject(s) did you like most and why?**

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**b). What subject(s) did you least most and why?**

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**Q.10. Did you notice any difference in the relationships between yourself and your teachers?**

Yes

No

If yes, please specify.

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**Q.11. Did you notice any difference in your teachers approach to teaching your lessons?**

Yes

No

If yes, please specify how it differed.

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**Q.12. In your opinion was your overall experience of Transition Year worthwhile?**

Yes

No

**Q.13. If you had the choice what changes would you make to the Transition Year**

**Programme in order to make it more interesting for students.**

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*Your co-operation and time taken to fill out this questionnaire is greatly appreciated.*

## **Appendix 5.**

## **Principal Questionnaire**

1. How would you describe your school, number of students presently attending?
2. Your educational focus, is it academic or vocational or a mixture of both?
3. How would you describe the ethos of your school?
4. Is Transition Year offered on a compulsory or optional basis?
5. What is your reason for compulsory/ optional?
6. If Transition Year is optional how do you select your students.
7. What value do you as a principal put on the Transition Year Programme in your school?
8. Do you feel Transition Year in your school is alive and well, or has it gone stale, lost its appeal for students and broadly in need of revamping?
9. Who is involved in decision making processes in relation to the transition Year Programme (curricular content, planning, evaluation, teaching methodology).
10. Do teachers have timetabled planning time for discussing issues in relation to the Transition Year Programme?
11. Is the Transition Year Programme evaluated annually? When does it take place?  
How does it take place? Who is involved? What is the purpose of this evaluation?
12. What in your option are the main factors that contribute to the overall success or failure of the Transition Year Programme?
13. Voluntary contribution, does it exist? How much is it? How is it spent?
14. Community services, to what extent are the students involved?
15. Interdisciplinary cross-curricular activities, do they exist?
16. Parental involvement, does it exist? To what extent?
17. How would you describe your role as principal in relation to TYP?

## Appendix 6.

Athgoe North,  
Newcastle,  
Co Dublin.

Dear Principal,

I am currently teaching in Lucan Community College and I am engaged in research as part of a post-graduate Masters Degree at NUI Maynooth. I am interested in finding out your views and those of the Transition Year co-ordinator in your school on issues relating to the Transition Year Programme. I would also like to survey a sample of Transition Year teachers and students in this regard. Confidentiality in relation to all aspects of the survey is assured and the primary audience of the research findings will be the academic staff of NUI.

I am aware of your busy schedule and that I am probably adding to your already overloaded time schedule, but your help and views in relation to the transition Year would be greatly valued. I will contact you in the near future to discuss the issue further and I look forward to speaking with you again.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Boran.