UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

INNOVATION AND RESISTANCE IN IRISH SCHOOLING: THE CASE OF TRANSITION YEAR

Name: **Gerry Jeffers**

Supervisor: **Dr. Jim Gleeson**

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Abstract

INNOVATION AND RESISTANCE IN IRISH SCHOOLING : THE CASE OF TRANSITION YEAR

Gerry Jeffers

The mainstreaming of the optional Transition Year (TY) programme in 1994 was a significant innovation in Irish second-level schooling. TY offers schools and teachers extensive freedom to devise imaginative curricula with a particular emphasis on personal and social development and education for citizenship. In this study, an historical perspective identifies ambiguous attitudes to TY since its origins in 1974. The relevant literature on key concepts associated with schools as organisations, educational innovation and resistance, young people's learning, school leadership and teacher development is reviewed. A central focus of the study involves exploring the attitudes to TY of students, parents, teachers and school leaders using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. A consistent pattern through the emerging data is that students are more mature as a result of the TY experience. Young people's confidence grows, student-teacher relationships are enhanced and opportunities to explore adult and working life are seen as distinct benefits. Individual schools tend to domesticate TY according to their particular histories, traditions, values and contexts. Domestication involves highlighting features of the TY guidelines that fit with schools' existing identities and neglecting others. The quality of school leadership, particularly by principals and TY co-ordinators, is identified as critically important for effective implementation of the programme. Parents' attitudes to TY tend to be positive, though they consistently express a desire for more information about the programme. TY's relationship with other second-level programmes is seen as problematic and significant tensions are identified. The second part of the research involved seeking the perceptions of and attitudes to TY of senior personnel in nine key agencies involved in the making, shaping and implementing of education policy were sought. Discussion resulting from both sets of data examines paradoxical positions where some features of TY are embraced and others resisted. Policy weaknesses are seen as contributing to ambiguous attitudes. Enthusiasm for the innovation is tempered by covert resistance that isolates TY in a type of parallel universe and ensures the hegemony of existing arrangements in schools, notably, the established Leaving Certificate programme and the associated 'points system'. Current practices which ensure that some young people benefit from six years of second-level schooling and other receive five is seen as unjust and deserving of policy-makers' urgent attention. Policy implications of the findings, particularly for teachers' professional development, are discussed.

Declaration

I, Gerry Jeffers, declare that this thesis is my own work. As indicated throughout the thesis, *Attitudes to Transition Year*, a report to the Department of Education and Science, based on some data used in this research, was published in 2007. A summary of that report was published by the Education Department, NUI Maynooth.

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Gerry Jeffers, 30 May 2008

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Particular thanks are due to Dr. Jim Gleeson for his support, advice and friendship during the adventure of the past few years. As a supervisor, his blend of incisive critique, intellectual challenge and warm encouragement was much appreciated.

Finally, special thanks are due to my family, especially my wife Winifred, who, in sickness and in health, continued to support and have faith in me.

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity *or* it becomes 'the practice of freedom,' the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

<div align="right">Richard Shaull</div>

Foreword to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by Paolo Friere, Penguin Books, 1996, p.16

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List of abbreviations used in the text

ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland
CEB	Curriculum and Examinations Board
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSPE	Civic, Social and Political Education
DE	Department of Education
DES	Department of Education and Science
eLC	established Leaving Certificate
ERC	Education Research Centre
ESF	European Social Fund
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ICE	Intermediate Certificate Examination
JC	Junior Certificate
LC	Leaving Certificate
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
LDS	Leadership Development for Schools
NAPD	National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NGO	Non governmental organisation
NPCpp	National Parents Council, post-primary
OECD	Organisation for Economic Development and Co-Operation
RSE	Relationship and Sexuality Education
SDPI	School Development Planning Initiative
SLSS	Second-Level Support Service
SPHE	Social Personal and Health Education
TU	Transition Unit
TUI	Teachers Union of Ireland
TY	Transition Year
TYCSS	Transition Year Curriculum Support Service
TYST	Transition Year Support Team

TYO   Transition Year Option

TYP   Transition Year Programme

VEC   Vocational Education Committee

VPTP   Vocational Preparation and Training Programme

WSE   Whole School Evaluation

YSI   Young Social Innovators

Introduction

This thesis originates from the author's interest in and engagement with Transition Year (TY) as an innovation in Irish schooling. The research began by examining attitudes to the programme. A case study approach, with TY as the case, developed and the logic of the enquiry led to focusing on TY as a lens to view how an innovation is both integrated into the schooling system and how the system also resists the innovation.

The thesis is set out in seven chapters. Chapter 1 charts the origins and development of TY. The early part of this chapter includes data from an interview conducted in 2001 with the originator of TY, the then Minister for Education, Richard Burke T.D. The author identifies ambiguous attitudes to the Transition Year programme through its three stages of development since 1974. The slow uptake by schools of the programme in the years up to 1994 is a particular indicator of ambiguous attitudes. During the third stage of TY's development, sometimes referred to as mainstreaming, this author was directly involved supporting schools to implement TY. Working with schools which were introducing TY for the first time or were revitalising their programmes provided a unique perspective on attitudes to TY.

Chapter 2 surveys the key concepts in the literature relevant to the context in which TY operates. Firstly, the chapter looks at the complexity of schools as organisations. Some of the forces pushing for curriculum reform within Irish schooling are identified. These are positioned after a section dealing with the distinct cultures of schools, particularly their robustness and their resistance to change. As young people are central to the schooling process, the importance of

hearing their voices is highlighted. This section includes a review of literature associated with adolescent motivation and learning and the implications for curriculum construction and classroom practice. Outlines of the perspectives of Carl Rogers, John Dewey, Paulo Friere, David Kolb and Howard Gardner, and others who have had a particular influence on the author's thinking follow.

Arising from the focus on schools as particular types of organisations and young people as having distinct needs, the literature review then addresses some issues relating to school leadership. This chapter concludes with an exploration of how some of the issues already mentioned impact on teachers. Thus, there are sections on innovation, resistance, complexity, the emotional dimension of teachers' work as well as teachers' professional development and the importance of 'agency'.

The case study methodology adopted for the research is explained in Chapter 3. This chapter also includes accounts of how data was gathered, initially from six school sites and subsequently from senior personnel in nine agencies involved in making and shaping educational policy. Because of the author's previous experience working on TY related support services between 1994 and 2000, he has to be seen as an advocate for TY. With this background there were particular advantages but also potential pitfalls in acting as researcher regarding TY. This situation was further complicated by being commissioned by the DES in 2001 to research attitudes to TY. As a researcher, the attempt was to let the thesis be driven by the emerging data. However, prior insights about the programme, particularly practices in schools, was not just a lens that could not be ignored but is one which the author believes was an enriching one, especially in detecting a lack of fit between rhetoric and reality.

Initially the research question was formulated as follows:

> What are the attitudes of the critical actors – students, teachers, parents and school leaders – towards TY and how do these attitudes manifest themselves in the operation of TY at six distinct school sites?

This led to a second question:

Based on insights from the first part of the research, what are the attitudes of senior personnel in key agencies involved in the shaping and making of educational policy towards Transition Year as in innovation in Irish post-primary schooling?

However, as the research progressed and the researcher allowed himself to be driven by the emerging data, it became clear later that a third, underlying research question had been presenting itself throughout. This refers to how an innovation acts as a lens through which the whole schooling system can be viewed anew. The question can be formulated as:

- What does the experience of TY in the schooling system illustrate about how the system –policy makers and shapers, agency officials, school leaders, teachers, parents and students – embraces and resists curricular innovations?

As reports based on the DES commissioned research on six schools had already been published (Jeffers, 2007a, 2007b), Chapter 4 profiles the case of TY in four of these schools. The theme of ambiguous attitudes to TY reappears here and the notion of the *domestication* of TY by schools is discussed. This is followed by Chapter 5 which is a synopsis of earlier research findings and recommendations. The inclusion of recommendations draws attention to a number of ethical issues that arose during the course of the work. These issues are mapped in some detail in Chapter 3. The author found himself in a difficult situation after submitting the report to the DES. While welcoming it in quite positive terms, the Research and Development Committee requested that some recommendations be included. It was the author's view at the time that making recommendations was not appropriate for the researcher. There was also a fear that a set of recommendations would reduce the likelihood of the report being read carefully. While respecting the views of the researcher, the committee responded with a further, stronger request for recommendations. Reluctantly, the author acceded to the request. This serves as a reminder that there is often an element of compromise between those who commission research and the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher is now of the opinion that, if asked for recommendations regarding TY in the light of the subsequent research, his recommendations would have different emphases, especially relating to some of the agencies discussed in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6 examines the perceptions and attitudes to TY of senior personnel in nine agencies involved in the making, shaping and implementing of educational policy. Again, the discourse of enthusiasm has to be interpreted in the light of actual practice and of strong support for existing structures and practices. The study identifies resistance that is often covert. This Chapter also recounts further ethical difficulties for the researcher - perhaps arising from his 'insider' status - notably when some informants declined to agree to the inclusion of material recorded on tape during formal interviews.

The final chapter selects a number of issues emerging from the study for further exploration. These include the significance of TY as an innovation, TY's contribution to democratisation in schools, various attitudinal positions regarding TY, the metaphors used in relation to TY and their significance, resistance to TY and the position and status of the established Leaving Certificate in particular. The discussion chapter also raises questions such as: is TY under-theorised; the extent to which teachers are agents of change and how does TY relate to inequality and associated issues in the system?

A bibliography and appendices follow the seven chapters.

Chapter 1

The Development of Transition Year

The development of Transition Year (TY) illustrates the non-linear nature of much current educational development, the multi-layered sets of attitudes to the programme as well the fact that TY takes place within the context of schools where more established programmes, particularly the Junior Certificate (JC) and Leaving Certificate (LC), carry a status and prestige that TY does not. The following overview indicates how, right from the outset, there were students, teachers, parents and policymakers with ambiguous attitudes to the TY project and that these mixed views continue to the present day.

The representation of the TY programme as a delicate flower in the educational garden is a recurring theme in its development. While the programme offered a vision of an alternative way of doing things, its introduction as a 'top-down' initiative was characterised by an absence of planning within the Department of Education and very limited support for schools wishing to participate. Indeed, while low levels of uptake of the programme characterise the early years of TY, the fact that any schools at all embarked on what was a very uncertain journey is perhaps more remarkable.

Stages of Development

Accounts chronicling the evolution of TY (e.g. Doyle, 1990; Humphreys, 1996a; Deane, 1997; Smyth, Byrne and Hannan, 2004; Boran, 2002, Jeffers, 2007a) tend to divide the programme's development into three broad stages.

Firstly, the decade immediately following its introduction in 1974 was an extremely fragile period. It involved a small number of schools and students offering the programme: only three schools offered TY in 1974 and by 1985 less than 1 per cent of those who sat either the Intermediate Certificate or Group Certificate examinations participated in TY the following September.

The second stage of TY's development centred on a government decision in the mid-1980s to introduce a three-year junior cycle for all students, and the publication in 1986 of *Transition Year Option, Guidelines for Schools* by the Curriculum and Examinations Board (CEB). A pattern of increased student participation is evident from this time onwards. In 1986, 2,918 students in 95 schools proceeded to TY. By 1993 the figures had climbed to 8,499 students in 163 schools, representing 13 per cent of that year's Junior Certificate cohort.

TY's third stage followed the restructuring of senior cycle education in 1994. For the first time, schools were obliged to engage in a programme of staff development as a condition of participation in TY. Formal support structures were put in place to enable such development and the model that was developed – a team of seconded teachers supporting regional networks of schools – later became the preferred form of support by the DES for other curricular innovations in the 1990s. The year 1994 saw the most dramatic increase in participation rates, with 21,085 students in 450 schools taking part in TY. These student numbers represent an increase of 148 per cent over the previous year and 31.3 per cent of the cohort that sat the Junior Certificate examination that summer. The figures for 2006–07 were 27,090 students in 543 schools, representing 46.7 per cent of the cohort that completed JC and indicating the programme's availability in seventy-four per cent of second-level schools.

Proposals by the NCCA (2003a) for further development of senior cycle education herald the imminence of a fourth stage in the evolution of TY. These proposals, which include the introduction of Transition Units (TUs), indicate a

policy concern that 'the benefits of TY are spread more equitably across the system' (NCCA, 2003a, p. 6).

Stage 1

TY introduced, 1974

Richard Burke TD, Minister for Education, introduced TY at the Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) Annual Conference in Dún Laoghaire on 17 April 1974. He admits that there had been little or no planning within the Department for the initiative. In the hurling vernacular of his native Tipperary, he says: 'It was a solo run', adding that 'nobody in the administrative or educational sector of the Department of Education had – good, bad or indifferent – anything to do with this idea. It was just sprung upon them and they were just told to go and introduce it' (Burke, personal interview, 16 Nov 2001).

Describing his initiative as 'potentially the most important idea to emerge from my Ministry', the Minister set out the kernel of his innovation as follows:

> Because of the growing pressures on students for high grades and competitive success, educational systems are becoming, increasingly, academic tread-mills. Increasingly, too, because of these pressures the school is losing contact with life outside and the student has little or no opportunity 'to stand and stare', to discover the kind of person he (*sic*) is, the kind of society he will be living in and, in due course, contributing to, its shortcomings and its good points. The suggestion was made that perhaps somewhere in the middle of the course we might stop the tread-mill and release the students from the educational pressures for one year so that they could devote time to personal development and community service. (Burke, 1974)

The Minister intended TY to be 'for everybody' (Burke, 1974). In 2001 he recalled that its location at age 15–16 was important because for many students it would be their final year in school prior to entering the workforce. He rejected the idea of a special year of transition between primary and second-level, an idea favoured by the teacher unions, and one prior to university, which he described,

somewhat dismissively, as 'Jesuit-inspired' (Burke, 2001, personal interview). Hence, from the outset TY was conceived as counter-cultural, as an antidote to the pressures within the existing school system.

Despite announcing such a major innovation as late in the school year as mid-April, schools were invited to apply to the Department if they wished to offer the programme the following September. A less than enthusiastic media response emphasised TY's fragility. The *Education Times* reported that the Minister, when questioned, had emphasised the importance of teaching logic and philosophy (*Education Times*, 1974a), and the paper's editorial implicitly questioned the relevance of TY to all students:

> Taking Mr Burke's suggestion for an extra year … one must ask how he thinks his idea can be implemented in city vocational schools where up to 50% of the intake may be in need of remedial education and a fair proportion of those will leave school with a reading age of less than 9 years. (*Education Times*, 1974a, p. 8)

The following week, the *Education Times* poked fun at the Minister's proposal with a Martyn Turner cartoon that juxtaposed the philosophically inclined with the realities of a building site, ironically capturing some of the breadth of TY's ambition: intellectual reflection combined with practical engagement in the world beyond the classroom as a preparation for adult and working life.

The sceptical attitude of the *Education Times* to Burke's proposal reflects tensions and ambiguities that still echo today. For example, a profile of the Minister, 'The Boy from Tipperary who made Good', noted:

> It (the TY proposal) has not exactly been greeted with wild enthusiasm so far, despite the Minister's interest in it. Will it work? Or will it suffer the fate of Civics, sliding into an educational limbo somewhere on the school timetable, and taking with it all the dullards and dropouts who are acting as a brake on the bright boys in the examination classes? (*Education Times*, 1974c, p. 6)

Following initial indications of interest from some schools for TY, the Department of Education organised a one-day seminar on 22 July, and in

September 1974, three schools began TY: St Joseph's College, Garbally, Co. Galway; the Municipal Technical Institute in Limerick; and the Holy Child Comprehensive School, Sallynoggin, Co. Dublin (*Education Times*, 1974b). These schools were joined by five others a year later: Newpark Comprehensive School, Blackrock, Co. Dublin; St Louis High School, Rathmines, Dublin; St Mary's Convent of Mercy Secondary School, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary; Convent of Mercy Secondary School, Roscommon; and Presentation College, Athenry, Co. Galway.

The following year nine more joined these eight pioneering schools. The fact that only 2 per cent of schools were offering the programme inevitably conveyed an image of TY as a minority pursuit, an optional extra. Furthermore, the majority of schools were offering TY to a single class group, usually of about 20 pupils. The notable exception was Newpark Comprehensive School in Dublin where 135 students followed a TY programme in 1976. Early figures for the uptake of TY also show that one school that offered it in 1975 did not have a class the following year but offered it again in 1977. Three schools on the 1976 list did not have a TY class in 1977.

The socio-economic communities served by the schools offering the programme at that time can be described as 'mixed'. Urban inner-city schools such as James's Street CBS; Mater Dei Secondary School, Basin Lane, Dublin; and the Municipal Technical Institute in Limerick focused on the transition from school to work. This was also a key point for some of the Community and Comprehensive Schools offering the programme in those early years. Undoubtedly, there were some schools, or at least individuals within some schools, particularly attracted by the opportunity to engage in curriculum development and the challenge of devising programmes relevant to young people's personal and social development. This group represented diverse social and geographical backgrounds.

A striking feature of the list of schools that pioneered TY is the absence of schools that charged fees; during the 1970s the majority of fee-charging schools offered a four-year track for the Intermediate Certificate. The under-representation of VEC schools is also a feature of the early lists of TY schools, perhaps reflecting the fact that such schools had only been allowed to offer the Leaving Certificate since 1968 (Coolahan, 1981) and were still establishing senior cycles.

There was no additional money for the initiative from the Department of Education. The Minister, himself a former teacher, believed that the implementation of his proposal would depend on the imagination and professionalism of teachers. He expected them to drive and develop the idea, as, in his eyes, TY offered 'An opportunity for the teaching profession to actually engage in education in the strictest sense of that term' (Burke, 2001, personal interview). Thus, while originally a 'top-down' initiative, TY required 'bottom-up' development if it was to thrive.

Burke's proposal of TY can be regarded as a practical response to what he saw as some major deficiencies within the school system. There are consistent threads of educational concern running through his period in the Department of Education. For example, in Dáil Éireann in November 1973 (Dáil Debates, vol. 268) he did 'some thinking aloud about the curricular problems of second-level schools' in the hope that his parliamentary colleagues and 'concerned educationalists outside the House' might 'help me reach some of the right and workable solutions'. He began by noting that:

> ... a far larger proportion of the school age population is pouring into our schools, that a greater proportion of this group is remaining, or wishes to remain if they see any point in what is going on there, for a longer period and that education is no longer restricted to those socially and economically lucky enough to be able to afford it. How then can the schools effectively cater for pupils who come from every occupational group and class and who differ radically from each other – in environment, in ability, in motivation and in levels of expectation and aspiration. How best does one adapt to our current needs an academic curriculum designed for an able minority with special

occupational requirements? Can we find, so to speak, a non-academic equivalent suitable to the needs of what is really a major portion of the pupils in our schools today? When we broadened the curriculum recently so as to give greater status to practical subjects and to business studies was this kind of exercise, admirable as it was in its purpose, the right answer? (Dáil Debates, 1973, vol. 268)

He continued to pose engaging questions. He wondered whether we should be aiming:

> … to change styles of teaching, so to improve the quality of learning materials, so to up-date the very organisation of the school itself that we will lessen the credibility gap which appears to exist all too frequently between what is taught in school and what pupils learn from their own experience in the world outside the classroom? Can we say with assurance that we have done enough to disprove, to some extent at least, McLuhan's glib dictum that children nowadays interrupt their education in order to go to school? How successful have we been in ensuring that education, which should be a leading into wonder, is not a leading into boredom? How successful have we been in our quest for an educational system that will really be relevant to the changing needs of our society in a world of kaleidoscopic change?

Referring to 'the recent and continuous explosion of knowledge', he asked: 'Have we persisted too much in our respect for the traditional range of subjects?' He proposed an 'open mind' on new subjects, warned against complacency and proceeded to focus on the importance of music and art 'in the cultivation of aesthetic sensibility and as channels of communication and sources of occupation for leisure'. He suggested that 'we should be as concerned 'as never before' with encouraging interest in 'these two outstanding creative subjects which are immensely important in what I understand is called "the affective domain of educational objectives"'. He spoke specifically about the value of young people participating in school orchestras as a 'wholly pleasurable and non-competitive activity' and as admirable in an age of 'ruthless competition'. The Minister also emphasised the importance of pupil guidance and the restrictive impact of examinations, speaking out against the 'branding of some candidates as failures'. He noted that other countries had experimented with different arrangements for modified forms of examinations and continuous assessment procedures. Referring

to an earlier decision he had taken to remove the requirement of a pass in Irish for the purpose of qualifying for the award of the Leaving Certificate, the Minister suggested that flexibility 'be introduced into our thinking in regard to the purpose which the Leaving Certificate examination should serve, the form which the examination should take and the type of certificate or results which might be issued'. Throughout this and other speeches there is a persistent concern to allow students to develop without the pressures of written and terminal examinations.

In retrospect, Burke's articulation of some of the curricular issues consequent on Donagh O'Malley's decision to introduce 'free post-primary education' from September 1967 (Coolahan, 1981, p. 195) is an early voicing of concerns that echo loudly through educational discussion to the present day. The ICE Report (Government of Ireland, 1975) points to the unsuitability of the form of the Intermediate Certificate for many, especially those from the 'lower end' of the range of 'ability, interest and aspiration' (Government of Ireland, 1974, p. 31). It suggested a 'moderation and assessment service' (MEAS), some of which would be school-based. The proposals were not implemented and 'the deep-rooted tradition of terminal written examinations' continued (Coolahan, 1981, p. 215). Similar concerns about curriculum and assessment emerge in the work of the CEB, various ESRI reports (particularly those authored by Damian Hannan), in the OECD (1991) review of the Irish Education system, in the Green Paper (Government of Ireland, 1992), the White Paper (Government of Ireland, 1995) and in the NCCA proposals for senior cycle development (NCCA, 2002, 2003a).

While keen to articulate his educational concerns, the Minister also demonstrated some practical political skill in consolidating his ideas for TY. Looking back he has no illusions that one of his 'pet projects' could easily have been scrapped. As he saw it, TY was:

> … a subversive idea which was not part of the current educational or administrative culture which would take time to take hold and the principal thing was to guard it in a regulatory fashion. (Burke, 2001, personal interview)

This he did by ensuring that a description of TY was included in the *Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools* (Ireland, Department of Education, 1976). He cites this inclusion as critical to TY's survival. 'That meant', he recalled with some satisfaction, 'that a Minister would have to make a political decision to remove it and then face parliamentary questions to explain his decision.' In his opinion such a move was highly unlikely. Burke identified the role played by Seán MacCarthaigh, a Senior Inspector, as most important in supporting the early development of TY. This inspector's encouragement of teachers to embrace TY is cited by many early participants in the programme as particularly inspirational.

Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools, 1976

The rules and programmes stated:

1   The Transition Year Project is a one-year interdisciplinary programme for pupils who have completed an approved course for recognised Junior Cycle pupils.

2   The Project is directed towards the intellectual, social and emotional maturation of the pupil. It is conceived as an introduction to adult education and to *education permanente*. Transition Year curricula can therefore be designed to meet the needs of

    a)   those for whom the Transition Year will represent the end of normal full-time schooling; and

    b)   those who intend to follow approved courses for recognised senior pupils.

3   The content of Transition Year curricula will include elements of the following: social education; moral education; education for living (including homecrafts and education for parenthood, employment and leisure); philosophy and applied logic; music and the arts; Irish studies; 'civilisation' courses for students of continental European languages; visual education; media education and communication skills, etc. (Ireland, Department of Education, 1976)

The programmes written by participating schools in those early years indicate some very individual interpretations of what was flagged in the *Rules and*

Programmes and, indeed, of school curricula. Often, a particular feature of the programme was given prominent attention. For example, files from Sallynoggin Community School indicate the considerable attention given to programmes of work experience and community service. In the Municipal Technical Institute, Limerick, the initial TY programme was divided into three components: Community Service, Communications, and Crafts (de Búrca, 1974). Another example is Crescent College (1975), which divided its initial programme into Academic and Vocational Development, Personal Development, and Social Development and decided that the emphasis would be on 'experiential learning, the teachers working as a team, and individually, as mentors and guides' (Crescent College, 1975).

TY reviewed

An early evaluation of the TY programme revealed some of the tensions associated with it. Egan and O'Reilly (1979) noted that the TY project was for 'both early school leavers, for whom the Transition Year will constitute a final year of formal education, and students who will return to do the Leaving Certificate'. They suggested that the name TY was 'a little confusing since it refers in effect to two different transitions, the transition from school to work, and the transition from junior cycle to senior cycle' (Egan and O'Reilly, 1979, p. 49).

In addition to the major tension between the transition from school to work and the one from junior cycle to senior cycle, these evaluators reported other tensions: between the emphasis on practical living and the focus on philosophy and logic; between the linear subjects (English, Irish and Mathematics) and the 'new' subjects. Attitudes in schools varied: 'linear subjects were deemed an irritation in many schools and received the minimum possible emphasis'; along with philosophy they were 'generally seen to be of little importance compared with the other subjects' *(ibid.* p. 55).

They compiled a list of 12 TY-related themes, which they regarded as identifying the differences of emphases in TY curricula.

TABLE 1   TY THEMES, 1979

1 Linear subjects: ensuring that students stay in touch with Maths, Science and Languages as academic subjects	2 Philosophy and Logic: introducing students to the content and methods of these disciplines	3 Student–teacher relations: expanding the traditional roles so that students and teachers can meet person-to-person
4 Social skills: giving students more confidence in their public speech and behaviour	5 Arts and humanities: offsetting the intellectual bias of the academic curriculum by adding music, art, poetry, the study of culture as units	6 Community service: giving students the experience of working with the poor, the sick, the old
7 Transition to work: preparing students for the role of the working adult, giving them job experience, getting them jobs if possible, teaching them job skills	8 New subjects: introducing new subject-areas, e.g. Media, Astronomy, which otherwise would never be presented	9 Self-analysis: some formal attempt to encourage reflection and self-assessment such as retreats, group discussions on leadership and personality, meetings with the counsellor
10 Education for practical living: imparting skills and information likely to be useful in practical day-to-day living, e.g. consumer education, household repairs	11 Education for leisure: teaching specific skills and interests for the use of adult leisure-time, e.g. listening to music, photography	12 Non-academic students: enabling the non-academic students to feel that school is for them too

While identifying basic problems within the conceptualisation of TY, Egan and O'Reilly observed that:

> … they have not by any means brought the project to a halt. Nor are they likely to. The reason for this is that many of the most enthusiastic and enlightened participants are the same people who have little time for problems of definition. From their point of view the Transition Year, as they are implementing it, is working satisfactorily; and if it does not conform with some blueprint in the Department – well, too bad for the blueprint. (*ibid.* p. 57)

Egan and O'Reilly also noted that students claimed: '... to have become more aware of themselves and others, more confident in social settings, more informed

about the world outside school, and surer about the careers they might follow'
(*ibid.* p. 57). They added that many of the students' claims were confirmed by the
teachers, that in some schools TY had 'a definite impact on the climate of the
school' and that TY had improved the 'attitude of the school towards early
school-leavers'. Finally, they noted that TY had introduced the school to the
experience of educational innovation as well to the idea of *education permanente*,
had increased parental involvement, and had removed some of the barriers
between school and the world outside (*ibid.* p. 58).

Commenting on the evaluation, Doyle remarks:

> Unfortunately, the most important advice given in this report was not
> followed, namely that the Evaluation Report would be part of a
> systematic programme of research that would include the opinions of
> the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and the evaluators.
> Such a professional evaluation was a prerequisite of effective
> continuity and development of the TY. The envisaged programme did
> not take place. (Doyle, 1990, p. 19)

Further evidence of the fragile and marginalised nature of TY during this first
stage can be found in the *White Paper on Educational Development* (Ireland,
Department of Education, 1980). Despite the inclusion of a chapter on curriculum
development, there was no direct reference to TY anywhere in the document.

Commentating on curriculum provision, Mulcahy located TY in the wider context
of the late 1970s when there was a trend in various curriculum projects to
establish 'a link for pupils between the world of school and the world of work'
(Mulcahy, 1982, p. 113). Similarly, Crooks and McKiernan (1984) reported on an
extensive range of innovative curriculum projects. They gave a brief account of
TY's first decade, noting declining numbers and how 'in 1983, the small financial
help offered to those schools which provided transition years was withdrawn'
(Crooks and McKernan, 1984, p. 26). However, commenting on their survey of
principals' views of the type of curriculum changes they would like to see in the
future, preferences for a broader and more comprehensive curriculum were clear.
Specifically, these respondents highlighted greater flexibility in catering for local

needs and ranges of ability, favouring courses that were 'less academic in nature, which foster pastoral care and personal development and which emphasise the development of vocational skills' (*ibid.* p. 131).

Harris, a school principal who worked as a ministerial advisor in the early 1980s, paints a picture of a system resistant to change:

> It takes strong and determined leadership from the top to bring about change. The very complexities of the education system, not to mention the vast array of vested interests operating within it, make implementing change a very slow process. Proposals to innovate tend to be viewed with suspicion. (Harris, 1989, p. 8)

In her study, *The Transition Year: a case study in the implementation of curriculum change*, Deane (1997) contended that a lack of support for TY at national and local levels had an important bearing on the low implementation of the programme during the early years.

The evidence suggests that TY was not a major priority within the Department of Education, especially after Burke's departure to Brussels in 1976. Ambiguities at the heart of the project combined with unheeded pleas for additional resources and in-service support did nothing to promote its cause. What is clear is that during the first stage of its development, TY, while attracting some interest and engaging a few, failed to attract widespread interest. Even in those schools where TY operated, there was a sense of a small number of teachers with high levels of commitment and enthusiasm keeping the promise that TY offered alive, much like a candle flickering despite winds of indifference, if not hostility. Gleeson argues that curriculum interests in Ireland are continually marginalised, quoting a former Assistant Secretary of the DES as stating that 'when it comes to the crunch it is not curriculum that is the big issue … it's structure and management and power and control' (Gleeson, 2004a, p. 124).

Stage 2

Impetus for the second wave of development

The setting up of the Curriculum and Examinations Board (CEB) in 1984 gave a new impetus to curriculum development generally. A further boost for TY arose from policy decisions not directly related to the programme. The publication of *Ages for Learning: Decisions of Government* (Ireland, Department of Education, 1984) was aimed at 'rationalising the structures within education'. These decisions led to the abolition of the Intermediate Certificate and the Group Certificate programmes and their replacement by the Junior Certificate (JC) programme. Significantly, within this new arrangement schools would take three years from point of entry to final assessment of the Junior Certificate. Schools that had traditionally taken a four-year track to the Intermediate Certificate immediately saw the TY as a way of maintaining a six-year cycle. Many of these schools were boarding schools and a six-year cycle was seen as adding to and, in some cases, essential for their economic viability.

Doyle captures some of the motivating forces at play in schools considering TY at that time:

> For the five-year cycle post-primary schools already experiencing falling enrolments, *Ages for Learning* offered a lifeline. Developing a TYO was perceived to be the most secure option, one that would ensure continuation into Senior Cycle of virtually all participants. For the 140 (approximately) post-primary schools already providing a four-year Junior Cycle (as part of a six-year system), TYO was seen to be the only way forward; ensuring acceptance by the Department of Education therefore became a preoccupation in the interests of retaining pupil numbers. (Doyle, 1990, p. 20)

The diaries of Gemma Hussey TD, Minister during that period, indicate that there was strong opposition from the Department of Finance. She gives particular credit to special adviser John Harris and Seán O'Mahoney who 'had worked very hard to beat Finance people into agreement' (Hussey, 1990, p. 158). Hussey also notes, with some relief, that media reaction, particularly in the *Irish Times*, was positive,

remarking that the newspapers were 'all particularly delighted about the six-year post-primary cycle and the transition year'.

In October 1985 the Department of Education issued circular letter M85/85, setting out the new options and inviting schools to apply for permission to offer the TYO in the school year 1986–87. Permission was granted to 115 schools, including 92 voluntary secondary schools, 11 community schools, 5 comprehensive schools and 7 VEC schools. According to Doyle (1990, p. 21), 20 schools did not take up the option. She adds that the 'controlled approach to the provision of TYO' within the *DoE* can be seen in three circular letters (M7/87, M39/87 and M8/88) which decided that only schools providing the programme in 1987 could continue to do so and that in 1988 the TYO was only an option for those who had completed Junior Cycle *in the same school* (italics added).

With increasing numbers taking TY, the anomaly that some students' journey through second-level schooling lasted six years while others' lasted five, was, like the three-year / four-year Intermediate Certificate journey that preceded it, structuring inequalities into the system. Perhaps because TY was presented in the language of choice – the TY 'option' – the inclination to examine it from an equality perspective was lessened. Furthermore, because so many of the schools that took up TY in this 'second wave' from 1986 onwards were ones that charged fees, TY became somewhat associated with privilege, which according to Burke (2001, personal interview), had never been part of the original vision.

 EC Transition Programme – Irish Pilot projects

Ireland's membership of the European Economic Community (EEC) from 1973 presented opportunities for fresh thinking about social developments in Ireland. Participation in transnational projects enabled significant learning across national boundaries and began to erode Ireland's traditional sense of insularity. Initially education was regarded as a matter of national determination and was not an explicit subject of transnational projects. However, a number of EEC and later European Community (EC) projects relating to vocational education and training influenced and enriched mainstream schooling. TY in particular was a major

beneficiary of the approaches to curriculum development and teacher development associated with EC action programmes on the transition of young people from education to working life. For example, between 1983 and 1987, 30 EC pilot projects across Europe – three in Ireland at Dublin, Shannon and Galway[1] – targeted 14 to 18 year olds with a view to increasing their employability. Youth unemployment was the overarching problem of that time. Rather than seek 'quick-fix' solutions, these projects adopted multi-faceted approaches and maintain a developmental focus. The projects' main activities were imaginative and far-reaching. They reflected some of the initial concerns that informed the TY project but also led the way in opening up new possibilities that many schools later embraced as part of their TY programmes. While championing alternative pedagogies, thematic approaches to learning and stronger school-community links, the EU Transition Projects list of activities included:

- the development and use of work experience schemes in second-level education
- the development of equal opportunities for girls and young women
- the improvement of guidance and counselling, and the development of youth information services
- the development of new forms of assessment and certification
- the integration of young migrants
- 'education for enterprise'
- schools and social action: the prevention of illiteracy, drop-out, delinquency, drug abuse
- the development of alternative curricula
- co-operation and partnership in a local or regional context. (Hannan, 1986)

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[1] The Dublin Inner City Education Project, based in the CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit, focused on 'the social and vocational preparation of young people with poor prospects of employment, in order to enable them to acquire a degree of independence in a changing society'. SPIRAL II, based in the Shannon Curriculum Development Centre in St Patrick's Comprehensive School produced a series of senior cycle programmes leading to national certification in the form of the Senior Certificate. This project also developed programmes designed to promote equality of opportunity for young women and a junior cycle language course that was nationally assessed and certified. In Galway, the Project for the Integrated Provision of Education (PIPE) developed three activity-based courses for Senior Cycle, on Community Action, Enterprise Development and the Working World. PIPE also developed a Technology course examinable at Group and Intermediate Certificate levels. (Hannan, 1986)

A particularly significant feature of these pilot projects was the staff development dimension. As part of the dissemination process, a newsletter associated with the projects quoted the then Minister for Education, Mary O'Rourke TD, as saying:

> Fruitful innovations of this kind are to be encouraged and I hope that it will be possible for schools to take advantage of the many valuable lessons of these projects ((Jeffers, editor, 1987, p.1)

This general and somewhat detached 'approval' of what were challenging and ground-breaking innovations needs to be placed alongside comments made by the consultant employed by the DoE to advise on the implications of the Irish Pilot Projects. He remarks:

> It is a pity that the innovative efforts of the three pilot projects have got such an uncaring reception from the academic secondary schools, both from the point of view of the better provision of education for those who achieve so little within their current provision, as well as the richer more integrated provision of education for the more able (Hannan, 1986, p.62).

This juxtaposition indicates a capacity for the language of support to sit comfortably alongside the practice of resistance, a theme that also runs through the history of TY.

The work of the Interim Curriculum and Examinations Board

The setting up of the Interim Curriculum and Examinations Board (CEB), in 1984, was a very significant development in Irish education. Moving control of the curriculum way from the Department of Education was accompanied by serious attempts to bring coherence between curriculum and assessment.

The work of the interim CEB from 1984 had direct and indirect effects on TY. The publication of specific guidelines on the programme (CEB, 1986a) provided schools with a clearer framework for developing TY and included many practical suggestions. These guidelines are discussed in the next section.

Initiating and energising debate about curriculum matters generally acted as a reminder that innovation in schooling was needed. The interim Board's first information bulletin declared:

> The Government's decision to set up the Curriculum and Examinations
> Board was a response to a widely held view that major changes are needed
> in curricula and assessment procedures. (CEB, 1984a)

A consultative document *Issues and Structures in Education* (CEB, 1984b) set the tone of the Board's work by raising broad questions of structures regarding curriculum and assessment and by discussing the aims of education (Crooks, 1987, 1990). Of particular potential significance for TY was a curricular framework for Junior Cycle consisting of eight categories[2] (CEB, 1984b p.17). While not rejecting traditional subjects, the view was that 'an interdisciplinary approach to syllabus construction is possible and desirable (*ibid.* p.19)[3].

The Board moved quickly from broad issues to focusing on selected key areas, including TY. By 1986, the Board's proposals became more explicit about particular values. For example, creativity was encouraged, especially 'by linking schools with local communities and environments' (CEB, 1986c, p.9). The Board recognised a need to foster confidence in young people. It remarked that: 'Overcoming the fear of failure is one of the most significant contributions schools can make in preparing young people for adult life' (*ibid.* p.9). *In Our Schools* also identified some key curriculum principles, each of which has a relevance to TY. They include:

- o adaptability: the curriculum should enable students to become self-directed learners
- o continuity: education should be designed as a continuum from the perspective of individual learners paying particular attention to progression from primary to post-primary education
- o curriculum breadth and balance including the postponement of specialisation until after the end of junior cycle
- o differentiation: subjects to be offered at up to three levels

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[2] The eight categories were: Communication, Language and Literature; Creative and Aesthetic Studies; Guidance and Counselling; Mathematical Studies; Physical Education; Religious Education; Science and the New Technologies; Social and Political Studies.
[3] Subsequent experience in the Junior Cycle indicated a strong reluctance among teachers to move too far from traditional subjects. The persistence and remarkable durability of established subjects is, as will be seen especially in Chapter 4, a distinctive feature of Irish schooling.

- relevance: the curriculum should be seen by pupils and their parents as relevant to their present and prospective needs
- flexibility: while centrally defined courses would continue to be provided it should be possible for schools, networks of schools etc. to submit programmes or courses to the Board for approval and validation.(*ibid,* p.13 sqq.*)*

Specifically at Senior Cycle, the CEB drew attention to a need to co-ordinate provision at the post-compulsory stage of schooling and to develop comprehensive aims and objectives for education at this level. It stated:

> In particular, the Board highlights the need for a re-examination of the traditional definitions of and distinctions between general, technical and vocational education, between education and training and between initial and recurrent education (*ibid,* p.28).

The Board saw TY and VPT as presenting 'major opportunities….for schools to innovate at senior cycle (*ibid*, p.30) and stated that the LC 'should be adapted to cater for the increasingly diverse needs of students' (*ibid,* p.31). The CEB's ambition regarding assessment was based on the belief that it is 'an integral part of the work of the teacher in the post-primary school' (*ibid,* p.36) and that external examinations should be complemented by 'coursework assessment and assessment of student performance' (*ibid,* p.41). A further consultative document on senior cycle later that year (CEB, 1986b) mapped in more detail how some of these proposals might be worked out in practice.

The CEB's agenda setting activities and publications heightened awareness of innovation generally within schools and thus helped create a less hostile climate for programmes such as TY. The publication of guidelines for TY (CEB, 1986a) enabled the Board to apply some of the practical implications of its thinking into a specific arena within schools.

Transition Year Option – Guidelines for Schools, 1986

Transition Year Option – Guidelines for Schools (CEB, 1986a) is a rich mixture of broad general policy statements combined with a specific focus on key aspects of the programme, these guidelines added substantial flesh to the bones of TY that had been outlined over a decade earlier. The original aims of TY were re-stated with new emphases and developments, with the general aim articulated as: '… the preparation of young people for their role as autonomous, participative and responsible members of society'. Quite a comprehensive rationale for TY was set out, and much of the ambition of the original 1974 vision was maintained and expanded. TY was seen as aiming to 'facilitate the integrated development of the intellectual, emotional, spiritual, physical, social and vocational development of each individual student through structured learning experiences'. It also aimed to provide young people with the 'skills and support necessary to discover their own individual talents, aptitudes and abilities for future educational and/or vocational preparation'.

The guidelines described TY as offering a 'broad general education that integrates academic study and careers education', noting that 'preparation for work should not have a narrow vocational focus or job-placement thrust'. Remarking that 'decisions on the specific curriculum to be followed in TYO will be largely school-based', the emphasis was on providing 'practical opportunities for learning experiences which are based in the local community'. This 1986 perspective drew attention to the possibilities regarding assessment, with TY being 'different from other educational programmes (e.g. LC) as, freed from constraints of particular kinds of assessment and certification, schools have flexibility to realise in their own way senior cycle aims, with emphasis on intellectual, social and personal development'.

These guidelines drew attention to many of the organisational features of TY, in particular marking out very clearly the responsibilities of school principals. Preparing a programme plan, developing a 'contract of learning', appointing a coordinator, facilitating regular staff meetings, preparing an annual evaluation report, informing parents of prospective students about TY, and providing TY planning time in the timetable were among the activities listed. Furthermore,

principals were seen as responsible for providing staff with 'opportunities for continued personal and skills development and an appreciation and understanding of curriculum development'. Additionally, 'in-service training and the development and improvement of teaching methodologies should be promoted, including interdisciplinary teaching'. Networking between schools was also encouraged.

While these guidelines were detailed on the responsibilities of school principals, they were clear that the overall responsibility for the day-to-day running of TY lay with the coordinators. In particular, the coordinator would be responsible for out-of-school activities, such as work experience and community service, for organising planning meetings and planning a series of 'highlights', and for keeping colleagues and parents informed about TY. Coordinators – who were to have some timetabled classes with TY students – were regarded as being responsible for assessment and programme evaluation. This creation of a defined role for the TY coordinator was novel and appears to have been accepted by the two second-level teacher unions, the ASTI and the TUI.

As well as allocating specific responsibilities to principals and coordinators, the 1986 guidelines outlined particular responsibilities for individual teachers, including the provision of a written plan for the year and a statement of how their subject/activity would contribute to the general aims of the programme. According to the guidelines teachers should be involved in the assessment of student performance and in evaluating the programme.

The guidelines clearly signalled that parents and students should become more actively engaged in TY; for example, students 'should be invited to contribute ideas on and proposals for aspects of the programme' and should be asked for feedback on course activities. The underlying view suggested TY as an arena in which to promote a more participative, democratic model of schooling.[4]

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[4] Published memoirs and fiction that include accounts of Irish schooldays up to and beyond the 1970s paint a strong picture of schools as authoritarian institutions where fear continually

Central to this 1986 publication were expanded ideas about the TY curriculum. Among the components mentioned were 'academic, technical, aesthetic, additional studies, social and personal development and careers education'. There was a recognition that students' needs would vary considerably from school to school. In a telling observation, it was suggested that students who intended to pursue LC1 and LC2 would probably need a higher proportion of academic studies. Then, in what for some became a distinctive feature of this document, the guidelines stated that 'between 30% and 50% of the time should comprise traditional and/or academic studies'. However, this was qualified by the exhortation that 'academic and/or traditional school subjects should be seen to be clearly different to that of any other programme at JC or SC and be directly related to the overall aims of the programme'.

According to the guidelines, 'the main feature of the TYOs will be the use of a wide range of learning situations, extending beyond traditional classroom practice'. The call was for methodologies that would put a greater emphasis on learning as distinct from teaching, on personal responsibility in learning, on contractual learning, on discovery methods, on cooperative learning, on flexibility in methodology, and on integration of appropriate areas of learning. While the guidelines suggested that teachers 'should develop a range of methodologies best suited to their own interests and strengths', there was a pronounced leaning throughout towards the value of experiential learning, of young people's active involvement in their own learning, and of more democratic participation in school life. Perhaps indicative of some of the thinking that influenced the committee that

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lurked on and below the surface. There is limited evidence of encouragement of the active involvement of students or their parents in any decision-making related to the school, or oftentimes, of active involvement by students in negotiating or constructing their own learning experiences. Some examples include *Vive Moi!* by Seán O Faolain, pp. 36–47; *Home Before Night* by Hugh Leonard; *The Same Age as The State* by Máire Cruise O'Brien, *Against The Tide* by Noel Browne; *Reading in the Dark* by Seamus Deane, pp. 90–96; *Are You Somebody?* by Nuala O'Faolain, *All These People* by Feargal Keane, p. 80 sqq. *The Dead School* by Patrick McCabe, *Another Country – Growing Up in '50s* Ireland by Gene Kerrigan, p. 31 sqq.; *Carry Me Down* by M. J. Hyland pp. 159–163; and *Back from the Brink* by Paul McGrath p. 60 sqq.

compiled the document, four paragraphs are reprinted from a 1985 IFAPLAN document, *Education for Transition: The Curriculum Challenge*.[5]

Whatever about impressions to the contrary, the guidelines were unequivocal in asserting that 'assessment should be an integral part of all TY programmes' and that 'students should be assessed on all aspects of the programme'. Furthermore, the vision was that 'much assessment should be diagnostic and not necessarily related to certification'; the development of student profiles was suggested. Finally, in the assessment section, the presumption was that the CEB itself would provide certification and that 'the CEB hopes to formulate proposals regarding the assessment and certification of programmes which might be developed within TYO'. As those involved in TY programmes at the time are keenly aware, neither of these ever happened.

As with assessment, programme evaluation was also regarded in these guidelines as 'an integral part of TY': 'all schools should prepare an annual evaluation report' and it was intended that support and guidance would be 'available to schools with regard to the implementation of evaluation procedures'.

The DES followed up the CEB publication by issuing *Transition Year Option 1987–88, Notes for Schools* (Ireland, Department of Education, 1987), which repeated many points in the guidelines.

TY reviewed

In her review of transition year (1990), published in *Aspiration and Achievement: Curricular Initiatives in Irish Post-Primary Schools in the 1980s* (McNamara, Williams and Herron, 1990), Doyle lamented the lack of evaluation of the programme. She identified a pattern, 'evident in most of the TYO programmes being provided', that about two-thirds of the week was being devoted to general

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[5] IFAPLAN was a Cologne-based research agency that published extensive reports relating to the transition from school to work on behalf of the European Communities.

studies, i.e. Irish/Irish Studies, English, mathematics, religious education, a European language, physical education and art. She described the remainder of the time as being given to 'some form of Work Experience, Personal Development programmes and in many schools Commercial Studies'. The general studies section seems to have been equated with a 'core curriculum' and Doyle wondered 'what is such a core curriculum saying?' She noted the lack of integration between subjects, suggesting that 'this may be because preparation for such interdisciplinary learning is too costly in terms of planning time'. Having outlined the somewhat arbitrary two-third, one-third division of the school week, she listed a range of modules that actually suggests more varied curricula than is implied in her initial description

> … many schools include modules on a variety of educational experiences in the areas of Media Studies, Photography, Sociology, Child Care, Horticulture, Floral Arranging, Craft Work/Woodcraft, Dance and Drama, Home Crafts and Cookery, First Aid, Music and Music Making, Technical Studies, Computers, Science, a variety of Mini-Company work, Leisure programmes, and Personal Development programmes. (Doyle, 1990, p. 25)

Notwithstanding her comments about lack of integration, Doyle offered one particularly rich example of how some schools were offering interdisciplinary courses – 'basic literacy, numeracy and oracy', including media literacy, computer literacy and using the Arts (art, drama, dance, movement, music, etc.) – under the umbrella term 'Communications'.

A similar rich variety of activities was listed as taking place under the term 'Personal Development Programmes'. These included orientation programmes, health education, social and political studies, outdoor pursuits and self-defence training. In regard to Religious Education, Doyle, who had worked in the Education Secretariat of the Archdiocese of Dublin, noted that 'There is some concern currently expressed in schools for more supportive guidance on the Religious Education programme' (Doyle, 1990, p. 26). This, along with other comments in her review, reflects the tension between the freedom for schools to

be authors of their own work while at the same time seeking direction, support and guidance.

Doyle also noted a variety of practices regarding work experience programmes, and described the 'conscious efforts of teachers' 'to encourage collaboration between pupils' as a distinguishing feature of practice at that time. She regarded this as 'an important aspect of personal development' that is 'particularly valuable in face of increasing competitiveness in second-level education' (Doyle, 1990, p. 27).

Doyle's perspective on assessment was that the pressure on schools for more formal, summative assessment in TY was strong. She recounts how some schools had incorporated GCE examinations and City and Guilds Examinations into their programmes. Without indicating the extent of the pressure, she wrote: 'Some school principals find themselves at present under increasing parental pressure to provide more formal certification at the end of TYO. The question of developing appropriate forms of continuous assessment has never been seriously addressed' (Doyle, 1990, p. 28).

Continuing the theme of pressure from parents, possibly indicating the main source of such concerns, she later added that 'Principals, particularly those in six-year cycle schools[6] offering TYO, are under increasing pressure from parents to replace Transition Year by a possible repeat Leaving Certificate year' (*ibid.* p. 30). This observation was followed by, arguably, a more curious assertion that was neither supported by evidence nor developed in any way: 'Pupils themselves are now beginning to voice disenchantment with the idea of taking a Transition Year' (*ibid.* p. 30).

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[6] Presumably 'six-year cycle schools' refer to those schools that operated four years to the Intermediate Certificate prior to 1986. As already indicated, many of these schools were fee-paying, so it seems reasonable to presume that parental voices from these quarters were in positions of relative wealth and power, i.e. not necessarily representative of the population at large or even of those parents whose children had experienced a TY programme.

Doyle concluded by remarking on TY's survival 'despite inadequate funding and the absence of appropriate and adequate evaluation, assessment and certification'. She saw its continuation as a 'testimony to the creativity, professionalism and educational vision of many people, in particular the Inspectorate of the Department of Education which was actively involved in the development of the programme in the 1970s and whose hard work and enthusiasm helped to energise the many school principals and teachers piloting the TYO' (Doyle, 1990, p. 30). She also regarded TY as evidence of principals', teachers' and parents' determination to 'provide young people with an educational experience that seeks to go beyond the narrower confines'. While not disagreeing with these generous concluding observations, the double use of 'many' has the effect of underplaying the fact that advocacy for TY had been, until that time at least, a minority pursuit, frequently marginalised in educational discussion and debate. However, Doyle's overall perspective on TY echoed Coolahan's remarks in the foreword to *Aspiration and Achievement: Curricular Initiatives in Irish Post-Primary Schools in the 1980s* where he stated that the 'history of curriculum in Ireland suggests the need for sustained vigilance if real change is to be achieved' (McNamara, Williams and Herron, 1990, p. vi).

The various developments in the late 1980s, particularly the restructuring of the Junior Cycle in schools and, perhaps, the issuing of more explicit guidelines for TY led to an increase in participation rates. From a mere 484 students in 1984–85, the number of students following TY jumped to 2,918 a year later and by 1990–91 had reached 6,105. However, this figure still represented less than 10 per cent of the cohort completing Junior Cycle. Many schools had, in effect, decided to offer a five-year cycle, the three-year JC programme followed immediately by the two-year LC rather than embrace a six-year cycle. Despite the coming of TY's 'second wave' and the publication of clearer, more comprehensive guidelines, TY continued as a minority activity, operating in a relatively small number of schools with a minority of students.

Stage 3

Impetus for the third wave of development

A number of developments and publications in the late 1980s and early 1990s paved the way for increased TY numbers, the 'third wave' as it were. The OECD conducted a major review of the Irish education system and mapped out an agenda for change (OECD, 1991). Some of the recommendations in that report resonated with the core values of TY. For example, among the recommendations were:

> Increased flexibility and variety in the organisation of teaching and learning are needed in order to break down many of the present rigidities affecting the timetable, length of lessons, homework and so forth. The single, homogenous class and the instructional models associated with it are not conducive to co-operative team work or to innovative approaches to teaching and learning. (*ibid*. p. 62)

The organisation of the school day and of individual lessons should provide greater scope for more creative and imaginative problem-solving, skills enhancement, and practice-oriented approaches to learning. Students, as they mature, should be shouldering more responsibility for their own learning and at every stage they should be encouraged to display more initiative and independence of mind. (*ibid*. p. 63)

With echoes of some of the concerns voiced by Burke as Minister for Education in the early 1970s, the centrality of curriculum reform was clearly signalled.

> In secondary schools, the curriculum problem emerges in its most acute form. The weight of the classical humanist tradition is enormous, not least because of its underpinning of high-status occupations and a way of life which is widely admired even though unattainable by the majority. This dominance is likely to prevail unless the authorities are able to develop either a much more powerful parallel system of technical/vocational schools or a restructured general secondary education curriculum. (*ibid*. p. 69)

A 1991 report from the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) had revealed valuable indicators of students' views of their own schooling. 'Basic

education' – the 3Rs – were regarded by these young people as very satisfactorily provided for by schools. However, satisfaction levels for Personal and Social Development, Preparation for Work Roles, Preparation for Other Roles and Preparation for Third Level Entry were moderate to low, while satisfaction with Civic and Political Education was particularly low (Hannan and Shortall, 1991, p. 3).

The Industrial Policy Review Group Report (Government of Ireland, 1992a) – often referred to as the Culliton Report – argued that government policy in a whole range of areas had paid little attention to job creation. It argued for a closer alignment between economic goals and education policies. It made a number of specific criticisms of the education system such as:

> The contribution of productive enterprise to our social and economic objectives should be an issue of primary importance at all educational levels to de-emphasise the bias towards the liberal arts and traditional professions.
>
> A higher priority must be attached in the education system to the acquisition of usable and marketable skills. This is evident both from the perspective of the requirements of industrial development and for the employment prospects and self-fulfilment of young people. (p. 51)

The Green Paper, *Education for a Changing World* (Ireland, Department of Education, 1992b) took up many of the OECD themes and some of the tone and orientation of the Culliton Report. It also succeeded in engaging the imagination of the educational community. This document stated that a major objective for the 1990s 'will be that 90% of the age-group would complete Senior Cycle' (Ireland, Department of Education, 1992b, p. 97). There was a clear admission that 'The Leaving Certificate results reveal that there are many students for whom the examination, as constituted at present, is unsuitable' (Ireland, Department of Education, 1992b, p. 97). The Green Paper also stated that 'it is intended that schools should have maximum flexibility and options' in the way they operate the (three-year) senior cycle (Ireland, Department of Education, 1992b, p. 101).

In early 1993, Minister Niamh Bhreathnach announced her intention to publish a White Paper. In preparation for this, a number of projects were initiated, with the National Education Convention being the most high-profile one. The convention brought together representatives from 42 organisations – educational bodies, the social partners and the Department of Education – to engage in structured and sustained discussion on key issues of educational policy in Ireland' (Coolahan, 1994, p. 1). While the predominant focus was not on curriculum, the report noted:

> There was a lot of enthusiasm at the convention for the transition year option. It was noted that students matured during the year and sometimes revised their subject and career choices. Particular benefits, by way of improved self-esteem, seemed to accrue to lower-achieving students. (Coolahan, 1994, p. 75)

Another project initiated during 1993 involved a senior management team within the DoE (Secretary, Assistant Secretaries and Chief Inspector) examining how options within the senior cycle could be broadened. This group was of the view that, at that time, the economy was such that funding from the European Community was the most likely source of finance for expansion or development of educational programmes. One strand of the discussion within the Inspectorate, which was partly informed by the work of Howard Gardner on the theory of Multiple Intelligences,[7] related to broadening and developing a vocational dimension within the Leaving Certificate, beyond subjects like Engineering and Technical Drawing; this led to the introduction of the LCVP. A second strand related to a radically different programme, building on the experiences of the Senior Certificate and the Vocational Preparation and Training Programme (VPTP). Much of the internal debate on what was to become the LCA centred on whether it should be 'ring-fenced' as a stand-alone programme or whether it would be possible for students to 'mix and match' items on this programme with traditional LC subjects. The third strand of the revision of the senior cycle related to TY.

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[7] The author is particularly grateful to Chris Connolly, a former Senior Inspector in the Department of Education and Science, for his perspective on these developments.

Transition Year Programme; Guidelines for Schools, 1993

In the summer of 1993 a Working Group within the Inspectorate was set up to draw up new guidelines for TY. Chaired by Chris Connolly, it included Maura Clancy, Colette Hourihane, Tom Sweeney and Ray Kearns. The booklet they wrote, *Transition Year Programme; Guidelines for Schools* (Ireland, Department of Education and Science, 1993c), was completed in approximately six weeks. The 1993 guidelines differ from the 1986 CEB document in a number of ways. The 1993 version is broader, more flexible and less detailed. Specific references to aspects of implementation are omitted. An appendix outlining possible areas of experience within a TY curriculum runs to more pages than those devoted to 'Curriculum Guidelines' and 'Organisation'.

According to the chairman of the working group, the different emphases were not in any way intended to 'knock' the 1986 document. The main concern was to present the Chief Inspector with a document which was clearly focused, easy to read and understand and which would lead to action within schools. In terms of the uptake of TY, the evidence suggested that the 1986 guidelines had not captured the imagination of schools. The perspective within the DoE was that many schools operating TY at that time seemed to regard TY as a mechanism for holding on to a six-year cycle, rather than providing a distinctive educational experience away from examination pressures. The Chief Inspector at the time, Seán Mac Gleanáin, the Minister Niamh Bhreathnach and her advisor Pat Keating were all supportive of the idea of encouraging as many schools as wished to offer TY.

Chairman Chris Connolly's perspective was that the guidelines would help to mainstream the programme. His approach was influenced by the work of Hargreaves (1989), Senge (1990) and Fullan (1991) resulted in broad guidelines that would allow that 'the wind blow through the curriculum'. Hargreaves' perspective on the need to 'bring teachers back in' and to have a curricular initiative which was 'teacher-led' rather than 'government-led' was a strong influence on Connolly's thinking. He was convinced that schools had to become

learning organisations – a revised, re-energised TY could contribute significantly to this goal.

However, mixed attitudes to TY prevailed within the Department: 'it wasn't the Junior Certificate or the Leaving Certificate so therefore, to some, it just wasn't important' (Chris Connolly). Within the group compiling the guidelines there was a growing awareness that TY had the potential to change school culture and that it was the most radical of the initiatives being proposed.

Mainstreaming TY

Circular letter M31/93, issued in July 1993, heralded a re-structuring of senior cycle and can be seen as a watershed. From the start of the 1994 school year, within the context of a six-year cycle of post-primary education, all pupils were offered the option of spending three years in senior cycle, through a variety of options 'intended to provide maximum flexibility in the senior cycle in catering for the different aptitudes, abilities and needs of pupils' (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993). With the LC remaining as a two-year programme, TY appeared to be on the verge of being 'mainstreamed'.

The following November, a follow-up Circular letter, M47/93, set out in greater detail the revised structure and content of the senior cycle curriculum that would operate from 1995. Schools interested in offering either the LCVP or TY from September 1994 were invited to apply to the Department before 3 December 1993. According to this letter, the NCCA 'will prepare revised Transition Year Programme guidelines for September 1995 onwards'. The document adds that 'As an interim arrangement, Departmental Guidelines for Schools on the Transition Year for the school year 1994/95 will be issued to all schools shortly'. That 'interim arrangement' is ongoing.

The TY roadshow, 1993

The publication of the guidelines in November 1993 coincided with a Department 'Roadshow', which travelled the country explaining to interested audiences of principals, teachers, parents and others about the revised senior cycle with the four elements of TYP, LCVP, LCA and the established LC.

These meetings took the form of presentations followed by questions and answers sessions. Much of the focus was on LCA and LCVP. In many cases these two programmes were seen as particularly attractive to schools as participation would draw down additional funding from the European Social Fund (ESF). In schools this translated into extra money, additional equipment and more teachers. TY did not attract such European financial support, because it was not regarded as sufficiently 'vocational'.

The questions raised at these roadshow sessions give some indication of attitudes to TY at the time. The main questions relating to TY concerned funding. Other questions can be grouped into three broad categories. TY's distinct separation from the LC and 'points' prompted criticism and concern; many teachers expressed disappointment at the separation. Furthermore, the freedom to devise their own TY programme tended to be seen negatively by many school personnel; requests for prescribed syllabi were strong. The other main area of concern centred on an impression that TY was 'a doss year'.

In-service education

As well as writing the new guidelines, the Inspectorial team was charged with devising and implementing a plan for in-service education to support the wider introduction of TY into schools. Within the Department, there was a growing acceptance that the model of teacher preparation used for the introduction of the Junior Certificate had not been well received by teachers. It was clear that a new paradigm was needed. A shift from representatives of the Department handing out information about changes was needed. The goal was to replace it by an approach

that encouraged schools to become 'learning organisations', in which teachers played an active role. However, to do that well would require additional finance.

At this time a new plan – a forerunner of the National Development Plan – was being formulated with significant financial support from the European Union . There was a view within the Department that the in-service training of teachers should be better funded. Initially the figure sought was in the region of £80,000. Discussions about linking the mainstreaming of TY with an extensive plan for teacher development followed. The Department upped its request for money specifically earmarked for teacher in-service and, eventually, £10m, to be spent over five years, was allocated. Granville notes that the injection of these funds was crucial in smoothing the path towards reform 'which would not otherwise have been feasible and would probably have been opposed by various important interests including teachers, management bodies and parents' (Granville, 1995, p.151).

Chris Connolly wanted the new TY in-service programme to be teacher-led. In November 1993 he set about recruiting a five-person core team which would reflect different school types as well as different leadership and personality styles. By deliberately not designating a team leader, he emphasised the power of teamwork, thus modelling how TY might be delivered by teams within schools. This model offered an alterative perspective on the dominant hierarchical type structure of much educational organisation in the country and underlined the broad democratic orientation of the TY project. This five-person team was to lead the in-service programme and became known as the 'Action Team'.[8]

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[8] The author was a member of the team; so also were Eileen Doyle, Mary Anne Halton, Mary Keane and Dermot Quish.

Comparing the 1993 guidelines with those from 1986

While the thrust of the 1993 guidelines was broadly similar to the 1986 version, some significant shifts were evident.

These *Guidelines* presented TY's mission and overall aims in a succinct manner. These brief sentences became a key focus for much of the in-service education that followed with the particular terminology seeping into the discourse of schools.

The mission is stated as

> To promote the personal, social, educational and vocational development of pupils and to prepare them for their role as autonomous, participative and responsible members of society.

Overall aims are stated as follows:

> The following aims are interrelated and interdependent and should be strongly reflected in every Transition Year programme:
>
> (1) Education for maturity with the 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 aims and philosophy of Transition Year should permeate the entire school.

Some of the differences between 1986 and 1993 are worth noting. TY was now a 'programme', no longer described as an 'option'; TYP replaced TYO. The 1993 document was shorter, gave less attention to detail, said much less about the role of the principal in promoting a TYP, and referred to teacher collaboration, a core team and teamwork. For example, the programme was regarded as a whole-school responsibility rather than simply left to individual teachers. The 1993 version represented a more collegial and less hierarchical view of the school. The emphases from 1974 and 1986 on TY as a holistic programme were continued in the 1993 guidelines. Interdisciplinary work was more strongly advocated in the

1993 document and, significantly, any reference to a percentage of the programme being 'academic' was dropped. At the same time, the 1993 document sought to reassure doubters by stating that 'This is not to say that TY programmes should lack intellectual content; it is essential that they offer a challenge to pupils in all areas of their development' (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c, p. 5).

Other differences between the 1986 and 1993 guidelines are that all references to a 'repeat LC' as an option within the six-year cycle were dropped and, for the first time, the 1993 guidelines explicitly engaged with the Board of Management when it stated that 'All aspects of the Curriculum and Organisation should be clearly documented and approved by the school management and staff and by the Board of Management' (Ireland, Department of Education 1993c, p.12).

There were no references to the Inspectorate in 1986. In 1993 this had become a clear focus, perhaps an early indicator of the provisions in the 1998 Education Act and the first mention of performance indicators in the DES strategic plan 2001–04 (Ireland, Department of Education and Science, 2001). Another important development in the 1993 guidelines related to staff development:

> It will be a condition of participation in TY programmes that schools will become involved in programmes of staff development/in-service education which will be locally and regionally based. In this way, participation by individual schools will be possible in [both] the formulation, delivery and ongoing development of the programmes for their own benefit. (Ireland, Department of Education 1993c, p. 13)

The 1993 guidelines radically extended the ambition of the programme: 'The aims and philosophy of TY should permeate the entire school' (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c, p. 2). This was a new perspective. The 1986 view saw TY as more distinct, even slightly removed, from the rest of the school, sometimes indicating that there was a single TY class. From 1993 it appears that TY was expected to act as a kind of transformative leaven within the whole school. This perspective resonates with Chris Connolly's remarks about schools becoming 'learning organisations'.

Schools' response

Schools' response to the new set of opportunities issued in 1993 was swift and dramatic. More than 300 schools with no previous experience of TY indicated an interest in offering the programme.

Parents' attitudes

Parents' attitudes to the programme had, from the outset, been tinged with ambiguity. According to Murphy:

> Parents' attitudes to the Programme seem to undergo a significant transformation in the course of the year during which their children are doing TYP. Many of them are quite sceptical about the TYP before the year begins. By the end of the year they tend to be much more positive about its benefits. The change in traditional homework patterns and the perception of parents that the school's role should be exclusively academic are two of the factors contributing to some parents' prejudiced view of the TYP. The experience of seeing their children mature through their TYP experiences does much to alter their original perceptions. Needless to say, if pupils do not commit themselves to the TYP, and a number don't, their parents are quite justified in questioning its value for their children. (Murphy, 1999)

Supporting schools in designing TY programmes

Because the new guidelines insisted that a school's participation in a TY programme had to be accompanied by engagement in an in-service programme, there were immediate implications for the Department of Education. The team of five inspectors that had been centrally involved in compiling the new guidelines was now charged with the responsibility of devising a national programme of in-service for early 1994 in preparation for the mainstreaming of TY in September of that year. Teachers' less than favourable response to the introduction of the Junior Certificate programme and the increased availability of funds, through the European Social Fund, gave an additional impetus to imaginative ongoing policy discussions about senior cycle provision.

Selected teachers, familiar with TY's aspirations and practices, were brought together to assist schools in developing TY for the first time. As the 'action team' of five seconded teachers, working with a team of Department of Education inspectors, began to prepare for a national in-service strategy, a further 63 teachers were recruited to further develop and implement the strategy. This began with six days' training for all and the formation of 15 regional teams. Working in pairs, regionally based team members delivered a half-day briefing session in each target school. The pair first met with the school principal and TY coordinator and, later, with the whole staff. These sessions were followed up early in 1994 when each regional team delivered four one-day workshops for clusters of neighbouring schools. The target group for these workshops included the principal, the TY coordinator and up to three teachers from each school. Much of the material from these sessions was published as a pack of *Resource Material* (Doyle et al. 1994) and sent by the Department of Education to all second-level schools. The final stage of this national in-service strategy involved two further days of team de-briefing, development and preparation followed by a second series of locally based cluster workshops.

This in-service programme in preparation for TY's mainstreaming was evaluated by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) Drumcondra, Dublin, for the DoE. Overall reactions within schools were positive (Lewis and McMahon, 1996). For schools with existing programmes, the benefits were perceived largely in terms of the opportunity afforded for revision and renewal. For the rest the focus was on planning. The evaluation also noted:

> … the programme was perceived to provide valuable opportunities for the professional development of teachers, particularly at Action Group and Regional Coordinator levels … the school-based component was singularly effective in reaching whole-staff groups including principals and was widely appreciated in schools … the non-school-based cluster days were welcomed by participants for the opportunity they afforded to meet, and exchange information and ideas, with colleagues. Finally there were positive reactions in schools to the dissemination of documentation associated with TY and with the in-service programme in particular. (Lewis and McMahon, 1996, p. viii)

Chris Connolly, reflecting on the programme seven years later, admitted to experiencing grave doubts about the project on the first day when the 68 recruited teachers gathered in Drumcondra:

> There was a stage about half way through that morning when I said to myself, 'This is dead in the water before we get started.' Then there was a critical turning point. One teacher had launched a forceful, stinging attack of the proposals, commenting 'we'll be eaten alive out there in the schools'. Then a quiet-spoken woman, I think from Roscommon, said 'Hold on a minute. I think we have to see the merit in what is being suggested.' She then stated that she saw real opportunities for schools in what was being offered. This was followed by other positive comments and slowly the tide turned and there was a transformation within the room. By the afternoon, when the Action Team began to get down to the details of the training, I was confident that the project would be okay. Going home that night I had no doubt that it would succeed. (Connolly, 2001, personal interview)

This pattern of 'difficulty staters' standing up and lambasting aspects of TY became of feature of many sessions in schools. In most cases – though not all – there was also that key turning point when an individual voice articulated the possibilities, and colleagues rowed in, indicating some openness to experimentation and risk-taking. It was as if some pent-up anger and frustration needed to be vented before teachers could seriously consider new ideas.

As has been seen, a very small number of schools were involved during TY's first wave. Numbers increased significantly with the second wave in the mid- to late 1980s. However, by 1993–94 only about 13 per cent of Junior Cycle students were proceeding to TY. The impact of the third wave, that is, the combination of the circular letters, the roadshow, the new guidelines and the in-service programme, led to a massive increase in participation rates. The figures for 1994–95 show a jump from 163 schools to 450, with student numbers increasing from 8,499 to 21,085, an increase of 148 per cent. With 31 per cent of the cohort following a TY programme, it was still a minority pursuit, though much less so than previously. If one estimates teacher–student contact on the basis of one TY class to each 24 students and, conservatively, eight teachers per class group, then, where previously less than 3,000 teachers had some direct contact with TY, now

over 7,000 had some. Following this third wave, sometimes referred to as the mainstreaming of TY, the percentage of the Junior Cycle cohort taking TY rose slightly in subsequent years. Table 2 is based on available data and indicates some of the participation trends.

TABLE 2   PATTERNS OF PARTICIPATION IN TY, 1974–2007[9]

Year	Schools offering TY	Students following TY	Students sitting the Intermediate + Group or Junior Certificate, previous summer*	Percentage of cohort following TYP
1974–75	3	66	42,200 + 19,007	0.4%
1975–76	8	249	45,004 + 17,982	0.82%
1976–77	17	518	47,015 + 18,822	1.06%
1977–78	16	702	48,340 + 18,136	0.04%
1978–79		281	49,423 + 18,426	0.25%
1979–80		174	49,980 + 19,050	0.78%
1980–81		540	51,222 + 17,483	0.91%
1981–82		629	52,597 + ?[10]	
1982–83	11	545	52,597 + ?	
1983–84		503	53,455 + ?	
1984–85		425	55,071 + ?	
1985–86		484	56,706 + ?	
1986–87	95	2918	57,869 + ?	
1987–88		2786	58,964 + ?	
1988–89		2673	59,263 + ?	
1989–90		5564	61,278 + ?	
1990–91		6105	58,246 + ?	
1991–92		8050	60,395+ ?	
1992–93		8,193	63,179	13%

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[9] Published figures relating to TY participation vary. This table is based on data from the Statistics Section, Department of Education and Science, *Key Education Statistics, 1991–92 – 2001–02;* Statistical Reports; The State Examinations Commission (http://www.examinations.ie) ;'The Transition Year' by E. Doyle in *Aspiration and Achievement: Curricular Initiatives in Irish Post-Primary Schools in the 1980s*, edited by G. McNamara, K. Williams and D. Herron, Teachers' Centre Drumcondra, 1990; *The Transition Year Programme: A case study of participation, students' perceptions and curriculum provision in six schools,* unpublished MEd thesis by Eilis Humphreys, UCD, 1996; *The Transition Year: A Case Study in the Implementation of Curriculum Change*, unpublished MEd thesis by Patricia Deane, NUI, Maynooth, 1997; *The Challenge of Change: An Investigative Study of the Transition Year in Six Schools*, unpublished MEd thesis by Michael Boran, Education Department, NUI Maynooth, 2002; *The Impact of Transition Year on Teachers: An Investigation of the Effect of Teaching an Innovative Programme on Classroom Practice, Collegiality and Professional Self-Concept*, unpublished MEd (School Leadership) dissertation by Clodagh Ward, Education Department, NUI Maynooth, 2004.

[10] According to the DES, figures for Group Certificate candidates for 1981 until 1992 are not available.

1993–94	163	8,499	66,063	13%
1994–95	450	21,085	67,367	31.3%
1995–96	498	24,205	67,231	36%
1996–97	502	24,325	67,275	36.2%
1997–98	510	24,709	65,984	37.4%
1998–99	498	23,727	64,612	36.7%
1999–00	502	22,797	61,417	37.1%
2000–01	507	23,245	59,666	39%
2001–02	506	22,290	58,873	37.9%
2002–03	510	22,773	58,826	38.7%
2003–04	526	23,299	57,884	40.2%
2004–05	522	24,798	55,822	44.4%
2005–06	528	25,862	56,792	45.5%
2006–07	524	27,090	57,944	46.7%
2007–08	546	27,760	57,395	48.3%

* School candidates excluding VTOS candidates

\+ In the 1987/1988 statistical report the figure for students taking Transition Year is included under 'Other General', with 'other' courses not specified.

While the third wave saw a substantial increase in the number of schools offering TY, further examination of these figures reveals definite patterns. An analysis of data relating to the uptake patterns in 2000–02 reveals that:

> A pattern is emerging where a small, VEC school in the west or north west appears the least likely to offer a Transition Year, whereas a school in the east of the country is most likely to offer one. If that school is fee-paying, it is more likely to insist that all students follow a Transition Year programme. (Jeffers, 2002, p. 56)

Some geographical anomalies were also identified, for example, while 90 per cent of the schools in County Monaghan offered TY, only 30 per cent of those in neighbouring County Cavan did so. Similarly, in Munster, 88 per cent of the schools in County Cork offered a TY programme, while the figure for neighbouring Kerry stood at 31 per cent. At a sectoral level, the data indicated that 81 per cent of voluntary secondary schools, 40 per cent of VEC schools and 74 per cent of community and comprehensive schools were offering a TY programme. 211 schools were designated disadvantaged and 110 of them (52 per cent) offered a TY programme in 2000-02. The anomalous patterns of uptake suggest that while school type, disadvantaged status and geographical location are factors that have an impact on whether schools do or do not offer TY, local

factors, including the choices made at individual school level, may be underestimated (Jeffers, 2002, p. 57).[11]

White Paper, 1995

The mainstreaming of TY was well under way when the White Paper *Charting Our Education Future* (Ireland*,* 1995) appeared. This significant statement of public policy built on the Green Paper of 1992 and the report of the National Education Convention. There are some explicit statements about TY as well as some important pointers regarding the programme.

In mapping out provision at second level, the section headed 'Transition Year Programme' selects a number of features of the 1993 guidelines*.* It begins:

> The Transition Year Programme is interdisciplinary and student-centred. By freeing students to take responsibility for their own learning, the programme helps them to learn skills and to evaluate life in ways and in situations which arise outside the boundaries of the certificate programmes. The *Report on the National Education Convention* recorded the Convention's participants' enthusiasm for the Transition Year option: *'students matured during the year and sometimes revised their subject and career choices'*. (*ibid.* p. 75)

The reference to 'outside the boundaries' is particularly interesting as it seems to acknowledge some of the tension between TY and the certificate programmes, as does the allusion to the centrality of experiential learning. The section continues by drawing attention to how TY's impact can extend beyond students:

> Within the challenging framework of the Transition Year Programme, teachers gain greater flexibility and professional opportunities to design curricula, modules and short courses which are specially tailored to the specific needs of their students. The school is enriched by a range of active learning methods. Parents, the community and local enterprise can bring to the Transition Year a sense of the world

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[11] These perspectives have been informed by both the master theses and other studies already mentioned and by some very fine school-related projects undertaken by teachers following diploma programmes. I am indebted in particular to Terry Dolan, Brian Herlihy, Mary Mulligan and Angela Conroy, graduates of the Higher Diploma in Educational Management in NUIM, for sharing with me their insights on Transition Year.

and so contribute to an education which faces the demands of pleasures of life, work, sport and leisure. (*ibid*, p.75)

Pointing out TY's transformative potential within the school and community context suggests further support within the Department of Education for the aspiration that the TY philosophy would permeate the whole school. The final phrase, particularly the use of the word 'pleasures' is striking and can be interpreted as a counterbalance to the document's predecessor, the Green Paper (Ireland, Department of Education, 1992b) with its overall thrust of schooling to serve economic interests and its passing and incidental references to TY. The third and final paragraph in the White Paper flags four particular areas of perceived educational priority that might be addressed particularly in TY:

> The Transition Year offers a special opportunity to enjoyably underpin, in a non-examination environment, the importance of the Irish language and culture, the prospects of our European and world environment, the wealth of creative and performing arts activity and heritage and the equality of women and men in society.
>
> (Ireland, 1995, p. 51)

The term 'enjoyably' resonates with the 'pleasures' of the previous paragraph, and prompts the question: why just in TY when these are clearly issues that require underpinning throughout school years? Perhaps this paragraph was prompted by a concern that these four topics are not addressed adequately in the other five years and that TY can perform a type of compensatory role. If so, this is especially problematic given TY's optional nature and the significant proportion of students who do not engage with TY.

Later, the White Paper indicates some concerns regarding teaching and assessment. Such comments are especially relevant to TY. For example,

> Revision of the curriculum needs to be supported by changes in teaching methods. The development of teaching methodology seeks to ensure that the methods used are appropriate to the objectives sought. Teaching methods employed are central to the process of innovation and change. Traditional didactic teaching methods delivered knowledge and information from teacher to student. 'The need for styles of pedagogy which engage and involve all students more

actively in the teaching-learning interaction than was traditional' was emphasised by the National Education Convention (p. 73). The importance of complementing traditional methods with a wider range of teaching strategies is a key element in realising the objectives of the restructured second-level curriculum. New strategies will also help to harmonise approaches between primary and second-level schools.

(Ireland, 1995, p. 58)

That penultimate sentence resonates loudly with the line in the 1993 guidelines that states 'A key feature of Transition Year should be the use of a wide range of teaching/learning methodologies and situations' (*ibid,* p. 8), which lends further support to the extension of TY's ambition to 'permeate the entire school'.

Indeed, the next paragraph in the White Paper stresses the need to develop further 'whole-school approaches', not least regarding 'in-career development', where a strong 'bottom-up' perspective appears to be envisaged. 'In-career programmes will build upon the needs identified by the schools, arising from each school's internal evaluation and planning processes' (*ibid*. p. 59).

The White Paper signals the need for changes in assessment. Principles of formative assessment as an 'integral part of teaching', of procedures that are 'comprehensive enough to test the full range of abilities' (*ibid.* p. 59) and of support for more diversified approaches to teaching are invoked. Proposals are made for a 'shift in emphasis from external examinations to internal assessment'. More careful reading reveals that this change is more likely to occur at Junior Cycle. Indeed, the White Paper's authors appear anxious to reassure readers that there will not be any rush to change assessment at LC level. There is no explicit reference to assessment in TY.

Inspection and evaluation

During the initial year of mainstreaming, teams of inspectors looked at the TYP in 146 schools. They found that nine out of ten schools were following the guidelines in a 'satisfactory' manner. They added that:

> The consensus among principals, teachers and pupils is that the Transition Year Programme is a very worthwhile initiative, allowing the school to engage in genuine in-school curriculum development, offering teachers an opportunity to break free of overly compartmentalized subject teaching, and giving students the space and time to grow in maturity and to develop in self-confidence. (Ireland, Department of Education, 1996, p. 20).

This report, while echoing many of the points in the guidelines and praising schools for enthusiasm and innovation, also suggested:

— More attention to interdisciplinary, cross-curricular approaches

— LC subject choices to be delayed until the end of TY (some schools had been operating what looked very like a 'three-year LC')

— Further develop links with the local community

— More compensatory teaching

— More informal networking between schools for 'improving and revitalising' programmes

— Better assessment procedures

— Improved evaluation within schools.

The report also noted that external evaluation would continue. The *Irish Times* decided that the findings deserved front page treatment, though, rather than focus on the 89 per cent satisfaction, opted for a heading that read 'Department tells 10% of secondary schools to improve their transition year programmes' (*Irish Times*, 1996).

Media coverage

The *Irish Times* subsequently adopted a very positive attitude to TY, developing a dedicated page to the programme entitled 'Transition Times' which provided a valuable platform for popularising aspects of the programme. This page evolved into a media studies page, 'Mediascope, and later reverted to 'Transition Times'. In the years (until 2003) when that newspaper published a weekly education supplement, frequent items relating to TY helped to maintain a high profile for

the programme within the educational community and among the wider public.[12]
Furthermore, consistent endorsement of the programme in the media had a
legitimating effect, among those on the support team, within the DoE and within
schools.

Continuing support

Following the success of the concept of seconded teachers working on a regional
basis with schools, a full-time team of 14 teachers[13] – the Transition Year
Support Team (TYST) – was put in place for the 1995–96 school year. This
involved a four-person core team based in the Blackrock Education Centre and
ten regionally based members. Team members' contracts were extended for a
further year and then, subsequently, for the school year 1997–98. Commenting on
the TY model of teacher in-service, Hyland described the 'pioneering approach'
as 'particularly successful', noted that similar models were being applied to areas
such as Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Civic, Social and
Political Education (CSPE) at junior cycle and predicted that 'it is likely that this
model of in-service will be more widely used in the coming decade' (Hyland,
1997, p. 182).

Some sense of the range and quality of the TYSY's work can be gleaned from its
final report (TYST, 1998a). Between August 1997 and June 1998, the team
conducted 1,108 school visits, an increase of 258 on the previous year. More than

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[12] Particular illustrations of the newspaper's approach to TY can be found, for example, in the
issues of 'Transition year comes of age in Tipperary' (19 March 1996), 'School finds its
horizons expanded by Transition Year projects' (30 April 1996), 'Ireland's transition has been
an example to others', (22 October 1996), 'Transition: It's no doss year' (18 February 1997),
'Mission accomplished' (19 May 1998), 'Transition: It's another vintage year' (13 October
1998), 'Transition Year: Where does the time go?' (18 May 1999), 'Transition Year: from
good idea to good experience' (15 January 2000), 'Transition year students gain more points
– study' (13 March 2000), 'Transition Year – mind the gap' (16 August 2003), 'Mini-
company, major business' (3 March 2004), 'Welcome to the new transition year programme'
(15 September 2004), 'Are you ready to take the plunge?' (13 April 2005) , 'Starting
something big' (15 November 2006).
[13] The 14-person team was made up of a core team of Mary Anne Halton, Eilish Humphreys,
Gerry Jeffers and Dermot Quish and ten regionally based members : Bridie Corkery (Slieve
Bloom), Rachel Keogh (Boyne), Ruth Marshall (Errigal), Alec MacAlister (Liffey), Karl
O'Connell (Brandon) , Michael O'Leary (Jerpoint), Lynda O'Toole (Helvick), Bill Reidy
(Shandon), Geraldine Simmie (Moher) and Patsy Sweeney (Céide). Core-team members
supported the regions of Martello and Lambay.

half of these involved working with principals, coordinators and core teams on aspects of 'programme planning, timetabling, writing, development, implementation, assessment, evaluation, etc'. A total of 148 visits (13 per cent) involved workshops with the full staff or with groups of teachers. The third type of visit, which accounted for a quarter of the sessions, involved sequential meetings with individual members of TY teaching teams. An evaluation recorded that 97 per cent of principals and 98.5 per cent of coordinators were satisfied with these visits. During that year 101 coordination workshops were held, mainly in education centres. An analysis of over 1,000 evaluation forms from participants at these workshops reveals that 71.5 per cent rated them as 'Very Helpful' and a further 28 per cent as 'Helpful'. The evaluation report noted that 'Provision by the Department of Education and Science of paid substitution and travel costs is acknowledged as contributing to the success of these workshops' (TYST, 1998a, p. 24).

The report also recorded more than 20 networks of TY teachers that had been developed, mainly around specific innovations, with mini-company trade fairs among the more spectacularly successful methods for promoting networking. Furthermore, team members attended 53 sessions with parent groups, 9 sessions with students and 14 sessions at which both parents and students were present. A further striking feature of the team's work was the extensive contacts that had been developed with 'social agencies', including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), commercial bodies as well as state agencies, many of which contacted the team directly or were re-directed through the DES and expressed interest in developing modules, resources and teacher professional development in TY.[14]

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[14] A selection of the agencies that the team worked with during that year includes: The Incorporated Law Society (Legal Studies module); Department of the Environment (Car Driving module); Conservation Volunteers (Blueprint for a Green School); The Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) (Shaping Space project); National Gallery of Ireland; Society of St Vincent de Paul; Council of Europe; Amnesty International; Mobil Oil Ireland (Greensight video pack); Irish Congress of Trade Unions (Skills, Work and Youth pack); Schizophrenia Ireland; Dún Laoghaire Youth Information Centre (Information Studies); Tree Council of Ireland; Department of Marine and Natural Resources; Coillte; Windmill Lane Pictures (Project Forest); Jenue-Presse, Paris; European Commission (Ar thóir na hEorpa).

From the school year 1998–99 a new arrangement of support operated. The Transition Year Curriculum Support Service (TYCSS) consisted of a single national coordinator and five regionally based members.[15] This smaller team adopted similar strategies to its predecessor with a strong focus on TY coordinators as significant multipliers. The team reported to a management committee chaired by Assistant Chief Inspector Maura Clancy. There was also growing cooperation between the national coordinators of the LCA, LCVP and TY during this time, and regular meetings between the coordinators, and the assistant chief inspector took place in the DES.

Writing the programme

Both the support service and the Inspectorate noted in their respective work in the late 1990s that many school staffs were experiencing major difficulties in writing their programmes. In many cases imaginative programmes, or at least components of programmes, were being implemented, but the only one who knew in any detail what was going on was the individual teacher. The weakness of such an ad-hoc approach, especially for the consolidation and development of the TYP, was clear. Collaborative work between the support service and the Inspectorate resulted in the production of *Writing the Transition Year Programme* (TYCSS, 1999a), a guide on how TY programmes might be documented. The basic rationale was that documenting a programme which is school-designed and school-specific is both professionally responsible and practically useful.

The guide suggested that the first part of a written programme might include a general introduction to the school's TY programme, relating it to the national guidelines and to the school's overall mission. It also suggested that aims should be clearly stated and be the result of a process of consultation with all partners in the school community.

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[15] The TYCSS team consisted of Denise Kelly (Lambay), Gerry Jeffers (National Coordinator), Michael O'Leary (Tuskar), Lynda O'Toole (Blackwater), Geraldine Simmie (Shannon) and Patsy Sweeney (Humbert).

It was recommended that the second part of the programme would contain programmes for individual subjects and modules. A format for documenting this was offered:

− Title of subject or module

− Approximate duration of module

− Aims

− Objectives

− Teaching and learning strategies

− Content

− Assessment

− Resources

− Links with other subject

− Evaluation.

Extensive example of aims, objectives and teaching and learning strategies were provided.

The guide proposed that the third part of the programme might include organisational details, including the names of the coordinator, core-team members and students; the weekly timetable; main calendar features; assessment and certification details; finances; and procedures for evaluation. Explanations and examples of technical terms were provided.

TY reviewed

In his 'Evaluation of Transition Year in 18 Second-level Schools' Murphy (1999) noted that pupils enjoyed TYP and valued the opportunity to be active in a creative way, to develop many technical and interpersonal skills and to sample different subjects. He also noted their appreciation of the bonding effects of the TYP on inter-pupil relationships and on pupil–teacher relationships.

Murphy also described TYP as 'a most effective form of teacher in-service training', noting that 'like the TYP itself, it is a case of learning by doing'. He stated that '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' (Murphy, 1999).

Research on TY

A longitudinal study of those students who sat the Junior Certificate examination in 1994 attracted much public attention to TY (Millar and Kelly, 1999). Comparing those who sat the Leaving Certificate Examination in 1996 with those who took the examination a year later, this research indicated that the latter group – the vast majority of whom had followed TY – tended to achieve more CAO points than the former. The raw difference was 46 CAO points and, when adjusted for gender, school type and previous performance in the JC, 26 points. The report also noted the positive impact TY appeared to have on the progress of boys in both disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged schools. This study also suggested that students following a TY were most likely to be educationally adventurous with regard to the subjects they selected for LC, for example, more likely to take up a subject *ab initio*. The commentary by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) accompanying the report noted:

> While it cannot be concluded that participation in TY is the cause of this gain in CAO points, the data do point to a strong relationship between enhanced academic performance and TY. (Millar and Kelly, 1999, p. xxvi)

Perhaps ironically, numerous schools found this data more effective at convincing students and their parents about the value of TY than extolling the virtues of a holistic educational experience.

Subsequent research by the ESRI (Smyth, Byrne and Hannan, 2004) *The Transition Year Programme, An Assessment*, also examined the relationship between TY participation and LC performance and founds results 'broadly

consistent with the difference found in the NCCA study'. This report also drew attention to schools in which the programme was optional and suggested that 'there is evidence that students with behavioural difficulties may be discouraged from participating in the programme'. It noted the funding implications of specific activities and observed that 'additional financial resources are particularly relevant in more disadvantaged schools where it may not be appropriate to expect students (or their parents) to fund specific activities'.

Smyth *el al*. also identified 'lack of time' as the main resource constraint on the effective management of TY. They recommended additional resources to facilitate teachers' participation in TY related in-service training, particularly those who are not coordinators or core-team members. They also stated that 'current timetabling structures within schools militate against the development of interdisciplinary courses, for example, in restricting opportunities for team teaching'. They noted that it was difficult to capture the effects of TY on the development of 'soft skills' such as young people's personal and social skills.

They described the programme in 70 per cent of schools as 'diverse', with the nucleus of TY tending to be composed of six subject areas: academic subjects, cultural studies, sports, computer studies, work-related learning and civic/social studies. In schools providing very diverse programmes, third-level taster course, personal development courses and practical skills courses also tended to be timetabled.

A dominant theme throughout this extensive review of the programme in 116 schools, including in-depth investigations in seven case-study schools, was the variation in practices and perceptions from school to school and also within schools. The school-specific nature of the TY programme was very evident. Principals regarded the TY programme as broadly successful, especially in its impact on personal and social skills development among students.

In terms of uptake, this research provided further evidence that smaller schools and those serving disadvantaged communities were least likely to offer TY. They found that in the quarter of schools where the programme was compulsory, schools generally related this to the desire to make the perceived benefits of TY available to all students. Where TY was optional, student preference was identified as the most important factor influencing access to the programme. The perceived difficulties in having 'conscripts' and 'recruits' in the one year was cited as an important factor in maintaining TY as optional. They found some evidence that some students, especially those with behavioural difficulties, might be discouraged from taking part in TY. Reflecting the kinds of schools that offered or didn't offer TY, they found that students from middle-class backgrounds, those with higher educational aspirations and those who were younger than average were more likely to take part in TY than other students. Those with less of an attachment to school life were not as likely to enter the programme.

As regards managing the TY programme within schools, the ESRI study stated that 'The role of the Transition Year Co-ordinator is pivotal in the successful design and implementation of the programme' (Smyth, Byrne and Hannan, 2004, p. 222).

The researchers made some very concrete recommendations for further diversifying TY programmes, including specific suggestions for in-service training for teachers in 'modules' in subjects other than in their own specialisms. They also recommended that 'the allocation of guidance hours to second-level schools take adequate account of the core mission of Transition Year in facilitating long-term career choices' (*ibid.* p. 224) and that schools should locate the work experience placement within a broader structured programme of preparation and evaluation.

In terms of classroom interactions, the ESRI researchers found that less than a quarter of teachers reported using textbooks as their main resource (*ibid.* p. 121).

They observed that 'Teachers were more likely to report using a diversity of teaching resources rather than methods *per se*' (*ibid.* p. 225).

In keeping with the diversity of practices across schools offering TY, three of the seven schools in the ESRI study grouped their base classes on the basis of their academic ability while four did not.

Mixed views about whether TY should be optional or compulsory were also evident. Students valued the 'different experiences', the notion of a 'break' after JC and the programme's perceived effect on their maturity. Negative student attitudes were most evident among those who were not highly engaged in school life, in particular less academic students in schools where they were required to take TY.

Positive perceptions among staff and students were linked to some key elements of good practice, including:
— A whole-school commitment to the programme
— An effective coordinator with time to develop and maintain contact with other staff members
— A diverse programme, with activities and outings seen as particularly important by students
— A more innovative approach to assessment, consistent with the overall objectives of the programme.

The researchers added that there was, however,

> a tension evident for schools in developing these aspects of the programme while at the same time maintaining a level of academic engagement among students, particularly those with lower educational aspirations. (*ibid.* p. 227)

The published version of the ESRI report was launched in the DES on 5 January 2005. At that event, the Minister, Mary Hanafin TD, declared herself to be 'completely, absolutely and positively in favour of Transition Year'. Reflecting

on her own experiences as a teacher and TY coordinator (in Sion Hill Secondary School, Blackrock, Co. Dublin) she drew particular attention to TY's potential in terms of community service, which resonates with Burke's original vision, and regarded TY as 'opening up a space' where young people could develop. The Minister also stressed the value of a whole-school commitment to TY. She did acknowledge that 'the report also sets out challenges for policy makers to address, including concerns raised by some Principals of disadvantaged schools or small schools about the effectiveness of the programme' (Hanafin, 2005a).

Ongoing research by this author suggests that schools adapt and 'domesticate' TY to suit their core mission. For example, schools with strong academic traditions are likely to emphasise the academic benefits of TY, while schools designated disadvantaged may see it as a practical way of increasing the number of their students proceeding to third-level. Those schools with a strong commitment to holistic education will highlight personal and social development, while schools with low public profiles may find TY an effective vehicle for projecting the school's image as innovative and progressive to the local community.

Students consistently report that they greatly value the improved teacher–student relationships that emerge through the TYP as well as the opportunities for learning beyond the classroom. This research also finds that a tension between an instrumentalist view of schooling – favouring a five-year cycle – and a more developmental perspective – which sees TY as a core component of a six-year cycle – leads to ambiguous attitudes to TY among all stakeholders (Jeffers, 2007a).

When the Points Commission surveyed students on their views on the points system, the differing emphases that students, parents and teachers put on particular outcomes for schooling were evident:

> Many of the findings highlight the tensions and very real clash of values between what Transition Year promotes and what the points system seems to value. For example, Transition Year promotes maturity, independent research and learning, exploration of ideas,

initiative, teamwork, skills development, the ability to make judgements about their own work and the extension of the learning environment beyond the classroom. It is not always clear how the Leaving Certificate and the points system build on these educational experiences. The emphasis seems to be on individual competitiveness, knowledge retention and recall.' (Humphreys and Jeffers, 1999)

One of the recommendations in the survey report had to do with coherence:

'The set of experiences throughout second-level should be developmental and coherent. Just as Transition Year builds on the Junior Cycle, the Leaving Certificate should follow on, developmentally, from the Transition Year' (Humphreys and Jeffers, 1999).

NCCA proposals

In 2002 the NCCA began a consultative process on the future of the senior cycle. They sought the views of students, parents, teachers, schools, educational and social bodies, and other interested individuals and groups and published the findings in *Developing Senior Cycle Education: Report on the Consultative Process – Consultative Meetings, Seminars and Submissions* (NCCA, 2003a). *Developing Senior Cycle Education: Directions for Development* (NCCA, 2003b) followed. These documents carry many resonances with the early publications of the CEB almost two decades earlier.

The proposed directions were grouped into four broad areas: school culture; a restructured learning experience; a re-balanced curriculum and different assessment and certification arrangements. Of particular relevance here is the proposed introduction of Transition Units (TUs). For example, illustrating how a restructured learning experience might look in the year 2010, the proposal is that:

Some students have two years of senior cycle education, others have three. All students participate in at least one Transition Unit (TU). Those following a three-year senior cycle must take up to 5/6 Transition Units, which can be taken together in the first year of senior cycle as part of a full Transition Year, or spread across the three years. These units include: work-related learning, community

participation, enterprise preparation, special studies, arts education, ICT literacy, study skills, etc. – formerly associated with the Transition Year and the link modules of the LCVP. The TUs also place a strong emphasis on the skills embedded across the senior cycle curriculum. It is a requirement of matriculation that completion of at least one TU is presented on the certificate awarded on completion of, or departure from, senior cycle education. Research is showing that the benefits of TY are spread more equitably across the system. (NCCA, 2003b, p. 6)

The document also envisages short courses, in topics such as politics and society, media studies, social personal and health education, science and society and European and global studies. In the future LCA will be composed of some LCA-specific modules and a number of TUs 'which may be taken with other senior cycle students' (p. 6). Adult learners will be able to present accounts of prior or out-of-school learning as a TU. The overall effect envisaged by these changes will be, according to the NCCA, to make 'senior cycle education more equitable'.

Responding to the NCCA proposals, Education Minister Hanafin confirmed a particular interest in and focus on keeping TY, as it were, 'ring-fenced'. She wrote: 'I believe that a particular strength of the Transition Year is that it is a stand-alone year providing dedicated time and space to students to engage in educational experiences that will promote their all-round development' (*Irish Times*, 2005).

Despite the Minister's apparent lack of enthusiasm for the NCCA proposals, the curriculum agency has continued to develop its ideas for TUs.

Whole-school evaluation

The setting up of the State Examinations Commission in 2003 freed up members of the Inspectorate to engage in more focused work in schools. *The Chief Inspector's Report 2001–2004* (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005a, p. 11) records that in the period under review there were 12 whole-school evaluations and 21 inspections of TY. Reflecting policy trends that emphasise

transparency, these reports were posted on the Department's website
(www.education.ie). Since then, further evaluations have been conducted and
published.

Attitudes to Transition Year

Commissioned by the Research and Development Committee within the Policy
Unit of the DES, this author investigated attitudes to TY in six schools where the
programme was 'well regarded'. The report was delivered in April 2007.
Subsequently, the DES requested recommendations be included and a revised
version was submitted in October 2007 (Jeffers, 2007a). A summary of the report
was also published (Jeffers, 2007b). The main features of that research can be
found in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

TY conference

Over 300 delegates, mainly TY coordinators and school leaders, attended what
was described as 'the inaugural Transition Year National Conference' on 20 April
2007 in the Osprey Hotel, Naas, Co. Kildare. At the event, the Minister for
Education and Science Mary Hanafin spoke of her desire to see more schools
offering TY to their students. She announced that the TY grant would be
increased to €100 per student from September, the first increase since 1994.

Conclusion

This chapter has charted the development of TY since 1974. The slow uptake by
schools until the mid-nineteen eighties suggests ambiguous attitudes to TY from
the outset. Increased uptake during the second stage of TY's development arose
mainly from pragmatic considerations by schools whose traditional six-year
cycles were threatened by the arrival of the three-year Junior Cert. Despite
imaginative development of curricular possibilities and the publication of new

guidelines on TY, indifference and at times overt resistance characterised the stance of the vast majority of schools to TY. This changed somewhat with the restructuring of the senior cycle from 1994 onwards. While a majority of schools began to offer the programme, a sizeable percentage of the relevant age cohort either chose, or were directed, not to follow TY. Despite the figures, in recent years the DES has stated that: 'Transition Year, which has been one of the major innovations in Irish education, is an option which is now firmly embedded in the system' (Ireland, Department of Education and Science, 2004).

The extent to which TY is embedded in the system is a major theme throughout the thesis. The historical evolution of TY has been haphazard. The CEB observation in 1986 that the education system's response to changing social and economic circumstances was often uncoordinated and 'based on short-term responses to immediate demands' (CEB, 1986b, p. 28) continues to ring true. The response from the DES to the NCCA's proposals for developing Senior Cycle, while welcoming some suggested adjustments, suggests strong beliefs within official circles that present arrangements within schools are reasonably satisfactory. In the context of TY, for example, it is difficult to reconcile Minister Hanafin's concern (*Irish Times,* 2005) with not wanting to 'increase inequity' with the persistence of an optional, ring-fenced programme and the current uneven uptake according to school type, gender and social class.

Mapping this historical background has opened the way to looking at the contexts of schooling in which TY operates. This is the main thrust of Chapter 2. The persistence of ambiguous attitudes from the outset of TY's history helped frame the research questions set out in Chapter 3. As will be seen in Chapter 4 – profiling TY in particular schools – and in Chapter 6 - presenting the views of policy makers and shapers – mixed attitudes to TY are still evident.

Many other themes evident throughout TY's first three decades resonate throughout the data presented in the following chapters. Among the dominant concerns are the extent to which TY has become 'embedded' in the system; how

much of the innovation have schools actually implemented; what forces conspire to bring about resistance to TY and, given the differential patterns evident in uptake data, the question of TY and equity[16].

Chapter 2

Transition Year in the schooling context – a literature review

Transition Year's uneven development within the Irish schooling system since 1974, as set out in Chapter 1, can be read as a story of curriculum innovation and resistance. This chapter locates TY in a wider context, reviewing insights, nationally and internationally, into other educational innovations with a view to deepening an understanding of innovation and resistance in schools.

This exploration is shaped by the research questions posed at the start of the two data gathering phases of the study which are explained in detail in Chapter 3. The research questions are:

- What are the attitudes of the critical actors – students, teachers, parents and school leaders – towards TY and how do these attitudes manifest themselves in the operation of TY at six distinct school sites?

- Based on insights from the first part of the research, what are the attitudes of senior personnel in key agencies involved in the shaping and making of educational policy towards Transition Year as in innovation in Irish post-primary schooling?

As TY is an innovation that takes place in the particular context of schools, the literature on schools as particular organizations is examined. Young people are centre stage in the unfolding drama of any school, so the needs, the status of mid-adolescents and the literature on how young people learn are then explored. Teachers and school leaders are critical actors in the schooling process and in the construction of TY programmes. Hence, the chapter includes sections revealing what the literature says about their perspectives, especially regarding the adoption or rejection of innovations. Permeating the chapter is a search for

particular insights into evidence of schools' and educational systems' responses to curriculum innovations.

Schools

Schools are different

Schools are complex organisations. Handy and Aitken offer a neat summary of the core activities of organisations:

> Strategy - Decide on their key tasks, and the constituencies that they serve.
>
> Structure - Divide up the work to be done.
>
> Staff - Recruit the right people and keep them excited and committed.
>
> System - Find ways of monitoring what is going on.
>
> Skills - Train and develop them in the competencies required.
>
> Style - Work out the best way to lead and relate to the people.
>
> Shared values - Above all, create a sense of mission and a common set of beliefs. (Handy and Aitken 1986, p.32)

Applying their organisational analysis to schools, they sought to identify what makes schools different. As they saw it, there are four essential differences. Firstly, there is little time devoted to management of the operation. Secondly, schools don't have a single goal but rather are expected to deliver 'a pile of purposes'. Thirdly, they refer to role switching, where they question the assumption that 'the best teachers make the best managers'. Finally, there are the children. Are they workers, customers, clients, even products? (Handy and Aitken, 1986, 35ff) Educationalists, as might be expected, generally support this organisational view of school's somewhat special position. Sarason (1996, p.318), for instance, contends that 'schools are not unique as organisations. They are different.' Hannan (1989, p.23) remarks that 'the conventional formal organization models have little to offer us. Nevertheless they can help is to see ways in which schools are different from other organizations'.

An alternative way of articulating schools as organisations is as:

…. intentional systems for preserving and transmitting information and authority, for inculcating certain values and practices while minimizing or eliminating others, and have evolved over the past one hundred years or so to perform this function more efficiently. (Tyack, 1974 cited in Hodas (2001)

Hodas (2001) regards schools as 'a technology', that is, 'purpose built machines'. He identified a strong organisational thrust towards self-perpetuation. Of course, school are, he argues, not simple technologies, they have other purposes, identities, seek other outputs and do not respond in ways that can be described as rational. As entrenched or mature systems, schools, he contends, view innovation suspiciously, as a disruption, an intrusion, a failure of their organismic defences. Hodas suggests an organisational analysis that looks at flows of power, information and authority. As well as being 'technologies', schools are profoundly values-laden organisations, as he puts it they are 'the ubiquitous intersection between the public and private spheres of life' and so 'feelings about what 'values' should and should not be represented on the curriculum run deep and strong'. The pressure of external forces are such that there exists in the public mind 'a definite, conservative conception of what schools should be like from which schools stray only at their peril'. (Hodas, 2001)

In critiquing efforts to introduce modern technologies into classrooms, Hodas identifies 'the violence that technologists have done to our only public children's space by reducing it to an 'instructional delivery vehicle''. Hodas, starting from a technological concern, concludes, like Handy and Aitken, that schools are different because they are where children grow up, they are key sites of human development.

He arrives at a similar conclusion to that of Sergiovanni:

> … schools have a case for being regarded differently, as special places because they serve as transitional places for children. They stand between the subjective and protected environment of the family, and the objective and exposed environment of the outside world. (Sergiovanni 1996 p. xii)

As 'transitional places for children' schools perform important rites of passage functions through childhood, adolescence and into wider society (Hannan, 1989, p.19).

The purposes of schools

Many schools today have mission statements, succinct attempts to encapsulate the essence of their existence. These statements usually tell us little about a school's day-to-day life, and sometimes, for those who know, serve to underline the chasm between rhetoric and reality. However, mission statements do indicate the broad aspirations of an organisation, how it would like to see itself, and be seen. An internet trawl of the websites of schools internationally reveals the universality of the aspiration to promote young people's development.

TY's ambitious mission resonates with the intentions of many schools. The TY mission is:

> … to promote the personal, social, educational and vocational development of the students, and to prepare them for their role as autonomous, participative and responsible members of society. (Ireland, Department of Education 1993c, p.3)

These twin foci – the development of people in the present, linked, but also separate from, preparation for their future - are persistent themes in schools' mission statements. Of course, the meanings and interpretations attached to such goals vary. At least ten of the words in the TY mission statement are open to various interpretations; 'development' and 'prepare' are particularly problematic. Furthermore, concepts of learning, of the value attached to students, of understandings of the role of the teacher all come into play. Schooling itself is a contested concept.

Ball's view is instructive:

> Schools are complex, contradictory, sometimes incoherent organisations, like many others. They are assembled over time to form a bricolage of memories, commitments, routines, bright ideas and policy effects. They are changed, influenced and interfered with regularly, and increasingly. They drift, decay, regenerate.

> Furthermore, as values organisations they interweave affective, ideological and instrumental engagement – although a good deal of this is conveniently ignored or set aside in much of the contemporary work on school organisations. (Ball, 1997, p 317)

Mining the complex strata of beliefs and ideologies about the nature of education that pervade school contexts can unearth valuable insights into the assumptions that inform day-to-day practice in Irish schools. Origins are important. Today's schooling system emerged from a time when conceptions of childhood, human development, social interactions, even knowledge itself were very different, and in some aspects radically so. Baker *et al.* (2004, p.140) remind us that the 19th century origins of mass public education were driven by manifold motives, with social control high on the agenda. The principal remit of mass schooling, according to Bowles and Gintis (1976), was to develop a compliant and obedient workforce for the emerging factories of the new industrial age. In Ireland, as Akenson (1969), Coolahan (1981), Hannan (1987) and Inglis (1998) and others have shown, schools were crucial sites for the strengthening of religious and social identities. In this they contributed greatly to the construction of modern Irish society with all its strengths and weaknesses. As Baker *et al.* (2004, p.140) remark, schools were not designed primarily as 'institutions of liberation and enlightenment', though these were some of their goals. As agents of social control, schools also adopted the role of selecting, labeling and stratifying students by gender, age and levels of attainment. Ball's image of *bricolage* rings true and it becomes clear that schools are constructed, dynamic, evolving organisations.

Today, many see schooling in terms of rights and give assent to article 26 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights[1] (1948), regarding education as having both

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[1] Article 26 of the UN declaration states: (1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. (2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. (3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children. The UN Convention on

intrinsic value and being necessary in order to enjoy other human rights. Alongside this however, schools, like old boats encrusted with barnacles, carry much of their individual past histories as well as the collective, societal memory and expectation of schooling. Indeed, reading the 1995 White Paper *Charting Our Education Future* or the *Education Act* (Ireland,1998) reminds us of the weight of society's expectations that are regularly imposed on schools. A list of educational aims as 'guidelines for inclusion in the daily practices of teaching and learning in schools and colleges' reinforces the validity of Handy and Aitken's observation about the 'pile of purposes'. The scale of the Government's ambition for schools can be gauged from the following list of aims, which if isolated as single purposes, exceed thirty:

- To foster an understanding and critical appreciation of the values – moral, spiritual, religious, social and cultural – which have been distinctive in shaping Irish society and which have been traditionally accorded respect in society
- To nurture a sense of personal identity, self-esteem and awareness of one's particular abilities, aptitudes and limitations, combined with a respect for the rights and beliefs of others
- To promote quality and equality for all, including those who are disadvantaged, through economic, social, physical and mental factors, in the development of their full educational potential
- To develop intellectual skills combined with a spirit of inquiry and the capacity to analyse issues critically and constructively
- To develop expressive, creative and artistic abilities to the individual's full capacity
- To foster a spirit of self-reliance, innovation, initiative and imagination
- To promote physical and emotional health and well being
- To provide students with the necessary education and training to support the country's economic development and to enable them to make their particular contribution to society in an effective way
- To create tolerant, caring and politically aware members of society

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the Rights of the Child (1992) can be seen as a further explication of this article in particular.

- To ensure that Ireland's young people acquire a keen awareness of their national and European heritage and identity, coupled with a global awareness and a respect and care for the environment. (Ireland 1995 p 10)

Governmental rhetoric and ambition is often matched by high parental expectations for their children. To take a single example, Gardner, writing from the perspective of a parent, voices his expectations for his children's learning. He sets an ambitious bar for schools to reach and it serves to underline the centrality of education in re-constructing the world. He wrote:

> I want my children to understand the world, but not just because the world is fascinating and the human mind is curious. I want them to understand it so that they will be positioned to make it a better place. Knowledge is not the same as morality, but we need to understand if we are to avoid past mistakes and move in productive directions. An important part of that understanding is knowing who we are and what we can do... Ultimately, we must synthesize our understandings for ourselves. The performances of understanding that really matter are the ones we carry out as human beings in an imperfect world which we can affect for good or for ill. (Gardner 1999, pps. 180-181)

The purist desires that schools should enable children to flourish needs to be placed alongside the reality that schools operate in particular socio-economic contexts. Bowles and Gintis (1976), for example, suggest that schools play a critically important role in the maintenance of the capitalist system, that they reproduce the existing social relations of capitalist society by reproducing the consciousness necessary for such relations.

Thus, schools, as social institutions need to be viewed through a variety of lenses: historical, organisational, political, sociological, cultural, and anthropological or symbolic. Such analyses need to operate at least at two levels: firstly, the wider society's view of schooling and, secondly, the view from the inside, that is how history, structure, relationships, rituals and daily practices are understood and valued by those who work/teach/learn in schools. Tensions can arise – especially relevant to TY – between external expectations of schooling and the perspectives of those working in classrooms. Increasingly in advanced western capitalist societies, schooling is viewed as an extension of 'the

knowledge economy[2]'. The application of performance indicators and quantitative measurement, originating in economics, to schools is as problematic as it popular.

Schools: Functional to Personal

Fielding (2001) offers a strong critique of how a culture of measurement advances the notion of schooling-as performance at the expense of education-as-exploration, of accountability over responsibility. This, he contends, is inimical to the promotion of participatory democracy. Fielding's lens is valuable in the TY context as it contrasts functional relations with personal relations. A key consideration is that 'the functional is for the sake of the personal'. He argues,

> … economic activity (the functional) is only legitimate insofar as it helps us to lead more fulfilled lives (the personal); schooling (the functional) is for the sake of education (the personal)…Ends and means must be inextricably linked; the means should themselves be transformed by the ends by which they are inspired and towards which they are aiming. Thus, the functional ways in which we work together in schools to achieve personal, communal and educational ends should be transformed by the moral and interpersonal character of what we are trying to do. (Fielding, 2001, p. 703).

From this he constructs a four-fold typology of orientations to schooling which he calls 'impersonal', 'sentimental', high performance' and 'person-centred'. The first marginalizes the personal and is diametrically opposed to the second that marginalizes the functional. In the 'high performance' school, he says, 'the personal is used for the sake of the functional: community is valued but primarily for instrumental purposes within the context of the market place[3]' (*ibid.* p703).

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[2] For example, media coverage of the Annual Conferences of the INTO, TUI and ASTI during Easter Week 2008, reported the Minister for Education, Mary Hanafin, TD, as calling on teachers not to engage in industrial action 'for the sake of the knowledge economy' (RTE News, 26th March).

[3] A key difference is that the high performance school is dominated by outcomes, that the significance of students and teachers is derivative and rests primarily in their contribution – usually via high-stakes testing – to the public performance of the organisation. By contrast unity in the person-centred school is communal and persona-centred rather than collective and outcomes driven. Fielding believes that by applying the person-centred view schools will be more enabled to fulfil their democratic responsibilities and also 'be educative, engaging, inclusive and imaginative. (Fielding, 2001, p.704)

In the fourth perspective 'the functional is both for the sake of and expressive of the personal' (*ibid.* p.704). He offers a diagrammatic representation of his typology as follows:

TABLE 2.1 THE ORGANISATIONAL ORIENTATION OF SCHOOLS: UNDERSTANDING THE RELATION BETWEEN FUNCTIONS AND PERSONS *(FROM FIELDING, 2001, P.704)*

Schools as IMPERSONAL organisations	Schools as SENTIMENTAL organisations	Schools as HIGH-PERFORMANCE learning organisations	Schools as PERSON-CENTRED learning communities
The functional marginalizes the personal	The personal marginalizes the functional	The personal is used for the sake of the functional	The functional is for the sake of/expressive of the personal
Mechanistic organisation	Self-indulgent community	Learning organisation	Learning community
Community is unimportant, destructive of organisational purposes	Community has no organisational consequences or requirements	Community is a useful tool to achieve organisational purposes	Organisation exists to promote community
Efficient	Complacent	Effective	Morally and instrumentally successful

Schools in the context of changing societies

As indicated earlier, if curriculum is a selection from the culture in which schools find themselves, then as society changes so must schools. Underlying much of the literature on educational change is a belief that we are living through a significant period of social change. More than a decade ago, Drucker, for example, observed that every few hundred years in the history of western societies, there is a sharp transformation:

> With a few decades, society rearranges itself… its worldview, its basic values, its social and political structures… We are currently living through such a transformation. (Drucker, 1992, p.6)

Fullan remarks that dealing with change is endemic in post-modern society' (Fullan, 1993, p3). Acknowledging Drucker's observation regarding

discontinuity, Stoll and Fink highlight the challenge for schools in the emerging society as one of dealing with paradoxes, not least that of change and continuity. For policy makers, they identify the key competing priorities of quality, equity and efficiency. They suggest that 'equity' often gets marginalized. They argue that in a changing society, school change has to revisit basic questions about the purposes and meaning of schooling. Giroux voices these questions as follows:

> What kind of society do we want? How do we educate students for a truly democratic society? What conditions must we provide for both teachers and students for such an education to be meaningful and workable? These questions link schooling to the issues of critical citizenship, democratic community, and social justice. (Giroux, 1989, p.729)

Writing in a British context, Bentley (1999) argues that the evidence from social research suggests that many people are not coping well with the tasks and challenges of ordinary life. In particular, he lists the ability to save money for the future, to understand and persevere in relationships, to plan and manage a career, to recognise and carry out obligations as a citizen, and to cope with stress, change and insecurity. He also captures some of the tensions associated with trying to think imaginatively about young people and their needs in a fast changing society:

> One the one hand, we are spurred to guard and control them (young people) more tightly, trying to protect and pass on what we value and ensure that they do not fall prey to risks and threats. On the other, we want them to be creative and enterprising, to learn from the mistakes of previous generations and to solve problems where we have failed, such as sustaining the natural environment and creating meaningful work for everybody (Bentley, 1999, p 2).

Applied to formal schooling, this translates into a desire to prepare them for an uncertain future tempered with the knowledge that we do not have all the answers. The future, including the future of schooling, has to be constructed. Bentley adds the observation that many young people often embrace changes spontaneously, sometimes producing cultures and ways of thinking that can seem alien to 'those of us who are more set in our ways' (Bentley, 1999, p.2). The flexibility offered by TY appears directly relevant to the process of re-structuring schools to meet changing needs.

Not only does the introduction and implementation of TY represent substantial change/innovation/development/ reform, its ambitions extend beyond the programme itself. The Guidelines proposal that 'The aims and philosophy of Transition Year should permeate the entire school' (Ireland, Department of Education 1993, p.3), can be read as a deliberate, albeit somewhat indirect, attempt to bring about a radical transformation in Irish schooling.

As an innovation with, as already described, a chequered history, the wider literature on the diffusion of innovations reinforces some aspects of the TY case. Rogers (1995) divides innovation into two subprocesses, as set out below and also offers a framework for looking at the consequences of an innovation.

TABLE 2.2 DIFFUSION OF INNOVATIONS IN ORGANISATIONS (AFTER ROGERS (1995) CHAPTER 10, P.371 SQQ)

Initiation *Information gathering, conceptualizing and planning for adoption of innovation* ↓**Two stages**↓	Implementation *All the events, actions and decisions involved in putting an innovation into use.* ↓**Three Stages**↓
a) **Agenda-setting** – a perceived need for an innovation is defined. Can be triggered by a performance gap.	a) **Redefining/restructuring** – innovation is re-invented to accommodate organisation's needs, and the organisation's structure is modified to fit with the innovation.
b) **Matching** – a 'fit' between the organisation's agenda and an innovation	b) **Clarifying** – an innovation put to more widespread use; the new idea gradually becomes clearer to organisation's members.
	c) **Routinising –** innovation is incorporated into regular activities of organisation and loses its 'innovation' identity.

Consequences

Changes in the system as a result of adoption or

a) desirable versus undesirable	b) direct versus indirect
c) anticipated versus unanticipated	c) equality versus inequality

Fullan (1993, p.30)[4] re-arranges the Rogers' perspective to highlight the importance of 'routininsing' when he indicates that innovation involves three stages: initiation, implementation and institutionalisation. For Hoyle, 'institutionalisation whereby an idea or practice 'takes' with the school and becomes fully functional within it' is the most arduous phase of curriculum change (Hoyle, 1972, p.17.) Fullan's observation (1999, p.4) that change 'unfolds in non-linear ways' and 'that paradoxes and contradictions abound' is borne out by the early development of TY as set out in Chapter 1. Similarly, the validity of Sarason's observation that 'any attempt to introduce a change in to the school involves changing some existing regularity, behavioural or programmatic' (Sarason 1982, p.5) is also illustrated throughout TY's history. Revisiting this theme years later, he remarks:

> Any educational reform that does not explicitly and courageously own up to issues surrounding changing patterns of power relationships is likely to fail. (Sarason, 1990, p.31)

The finding of Huberman and Miles (1984) that schools often attempt to implement innovations that are beyond their ability to carry out is a sobering one. Fullan (1993) identifies the school principal as 'the gatekeeper of change' who can play a significant role in facilitating or inhibiting change. The same author also contends that the 'moral purpose of the individual teacher' is the building block of educational change (Fullan, 1993, p.8)

Such perspectives on the change process indicate its complexity. The political[5] dimension appears especially relevant in the case of TY, given the initial slow uptake of the programme and the fact that about 200 schools do not offer it currently (2008). House (1974), an early analyst of the change process in schools, offers some particularly useful insights. From the outset, he contrasted what he saw as great effort directed at changing schools with so little actual

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[4] While the Fullan reference is to 1993 and the Rogers one to 1995, the latter refers to the 4th edition of a book that has been regarded as a key text regarding innovations since the first edition appeared in 1962.
[5] Blase (2005, p.265) notes that much of the micro-politics literature focuses on 'conflictive dark side politics'. He suggests that 'both cooperative and conflictive actions and processes are part of the realm of micropolitics'.

change. A key contention of House's work, building on that of Torsten Hagerstrand (1953) is that 'face to face personal contacts' condition the occurrence and frequency of innovation. The structure of schools, with teachers isolated in classrooms – what Lortie (1976) compared to an egg-crate – inhibits innovation. Thus, within schools, advocacy for an innovation is vital. He argues:

Persuading teachers is by far the most difficult task, for, over the short and medium term, the success of the innovation will depend on whether an enthusiastic 'advocacy' develops around it. Advocacy requires a small group of people who protect and propagate the project in face-to-face contact. This is entrepreneuralism in its fundamental form – the organisation of goals and people. If advocacy does not develop, the chances of the innovation being utilized at all are very slim… (House, 1974, p.50)

As outlined in Chapter 1, a critical decision of the TYST and subsequently of the smaller TYCSS was to target TY co-ordinators in regular clustered workshops so that strong face-to-face relationships developed between them and support team members. The understanding was that they would, in turn, be active advocates for TY in their individual schools.

House sees the school as a political arena where programmes that challenge the *status quo* are likely to be contested. He says:

> It is important that the school not be seen as a collection of individuals passively waiting for and weighing the merit of innovations that diffuse through. The school is, rather, a collection of cohesive active groups, coalitions that sometimes cooperate and sometimes compete with one another. Most groups actively search for new means of advancing their own interests and new ways of defending what they have. They may actively seize upon new innovations in order to advance. …. Other groups resent such changes. A new program, while it may be an improvement, most certainly means some encroachment upon old prerogatives. When program change is significant it requires re-allocation of resources, and conflict is inevitable…' (House, 1974, p.51)

House maps the agenda for the advocate, working along face-to-face lines in individual school contexts, for a programme such as TY, when he says:

The more an innovation is a major re-orientation, the more necessary is it to gain resources politically, support skills technically, propagate new values emotionally, and teach new cognitions intellectually. These difficult chores must be initiated through close personal contacts; they cannot be forced (*ibid*, p.58).

As well as being relevant to the work of TY co-ordinators, this perspective is also valuable for school leaders and individual teachers. Further insights from House are included later in this chapter when looking at the specific challenges facing teachers.

Cultures within schools

House's political perspective also highlights the value of examining the phenomenon of 'school culture' in understanding how innovation and resistance play out in school contexts. According to Schien (1985)

Culture is the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic 'taken for granted' fashion an organisation's view of itself and its environment.

In schools, beliefs touch on fundamental understandings of the purposes of schooling, how children learn and, indeed, what it means to be human. Cultures, as Starratt points out, need to be seen in context.

Cultures do not operate in a vacuum. They are formed within and framed by particular structures. These structures are not neutral. They can be helpful or harmful. They can bring teachers together or keep them apart. They can facilitate opportunities for interaction and learning, or present barriers to such possibilities. (Starratt, 1993, p.256)

Stoll and Fink graphically describe some of the distinct features of school cultures when they say:

Metaphors, customs, rituals, ceremonies, myths, symbols, stories and humour are all facets of school culture….. There are various roles in the cultural network that make schools seem more like locations for a thriller or spy novel: priests or culture bearers, often assistant principals, guardians of the culture's values through their behaviour and speech; whisperers, unseen powers behind the throne (often found in the secretary's ..office!); spies, who keep their finger's on the organisation's pulse; heroes and heroines, who are revered;

storytellers, who play the role of interpreter; and culture founders, often principals, whose contributions or responsibility is the change of school culture by installation of new values and beliefs. (Stoll and Fink, 1996, p.81)

The OECD (1991) identified some key features of the cultures in Irish schools. These included the widespread use of 'instruction-dominated pedagogy' and the absence of other forms of learning, the authority based nature of pupil-teacher relationships, the emphasis on textbooks and memory for public examinations. They also noted a rigidity in timetabling. The innovations of the nineteen nineties, including the mainstreaming of TY, aimed to change the narrowness of this focus. Studies such as Lynch and Lodge (1999), Lyons *et al.* (2003), Callan (2006) Smyth *et al.* (2007) suggest that 'teaching to the test', close adherence to textbooks and unchanged timetabling continue as dominant features of the cultures in Irish schools.

Stoll and Fink's observations, above, and the subsequent paragraph when read alongside the guidelines for TY (Ireland, Department of Education 1976; CEB, 1986a; Ireland, Department of Education 1993c) highlight how radical a potential assault TY could be on established cultures.

The robustness of schools and resistance to change

So far the evidence from the literature is that schools are complex organisations where innovations can struggle to find a foothold, where the loosely coupled structures –especially teacher isolation – appear designed to preserve the *status quo.* Schools are seen as political arenas where different cultures operate, where curriculum can be contested. As resistance to change appears such a dominant theme in the literature, and TY's history is one of encountering ambiguous attitudes at almost every turn, some further examination of this resistance follows.

Hoyle (1972, p.35), echoing many of House's concerns, concluded from evidence more than thirty years ago that teachers were considerably modifying

innovations to the point that little fundamental change resulted. Sarason goes straight to the concept of power, remarking that 'Those who wield power do not look kindly on any possible dilution of that power' (Sarason 1982, p.55). Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) make the point that as well as challenging, stimulating and enhancing, change can also frustrate, even destroy.

The enthusiasm associated with efforts to implement large scale curriculum change in the United States from the 1960s onwards had to face the sobering realities emerging from evaluation studies. The title of Sarason's (1990) study *The Predictable Failure of Educational Reform* captures some of the disappointment. Fullan (1993) suggests that the educational community suffered a crisis of confidence that led to stagnation, recovery and regrouping. Top-down policies from governments followed. In the United States, *A Nation at Risk* (1983) reflected this new emphasis on centrally controlled regulation with a greater emphasis on accountability. At the same time, the wisdom of encouraging bottom-up, local initiatives was never fully abandoned. In the United Kingdom numerous initiatives that emphasised the power of teachers' agency flourished. The Humanities project spearheaded by a team led by Laurence Stenhouse is a sparkling example of such developments. In Ireland, as Crooks and McKernan (1984), Mulcahy (1981) report and numerous issues of *Compass*, the journal of the Irish Association for Curriculum Development testify, a vibrant community of curriculum developers engaged in exploring new possibilities in young people's learning. *The White Paper on Educational Development* (Government of Ireland, 1980) noted, perhaps grudgingly, that

> Some useful experimentation is being carried out in second-level schools, generally under the heading of civics, pre-employment courses, religious education and physical education. Some schools are also working on aspects of media education, health education, thinking skills and study. (Government of Ireland, 1980, p.45)

The White Paper also remarks that 'As we move into the eighties, it may be expected that the process of curricular change will be accelerated' (*ibid.* p.45). Establishing the CEB hastened some of this acceleration.

Plant (1987) offers a list of reasons for resistance in the face of change. Included are fear of the unknown, lack of information, threat to core skills and competence; threat to power base; poor relationships; fear of looking stupid; reluctance to experiment and strong peer group norms.

Individual teacher isolationism can also be reflected in schools themselves demonstrating a reluctance to share their issues and concerns with other schools.

Schools can, as many do, isolate themselves to maintain control and avoid criticism. In doing so they not only build barriers against potential partners, they contribute to the incoherence of pupils' lives. (Stoll and Fink 1996, p.133)

Hargreaves and Fink (2000) point to the difficulty, and at times, impossibility, of transferring school innovations across contexts. Datnow (2002) contends that that while transferability is possible, context matters and changes,

> ….. once they arrived in new schools they were modified at school sites in response to the constraints, circumstances, and ideologies of local educators.

McLaughlin (2006), surveying the pathway of 'implementation research' during 1970 to 1995 concludes that the 'overarching lessons from past implementation research features ways in which early analysts and reformers' (though not practitioners) 'underestimated or misunderstood implementation'. Starting positions, that is, how the 'problem' is framed, or as she puts it 'the problem of the problem' is critical in researching implementation. She also highlights the importance of context, that implementation is not unidirectional or linear. MaLaughlin advocates 'reframing connections between research, policy and practice'.

This persistent question of why the aspirations to reform made such little impact on schools also engaged Eisner who observed that 'It is much easier to change educational policy than to change the ways in which school function. (Eisner, 1992, p.110).

Eisner asserted that schools are robust institutions and offers nine factors that contribute to their stability.

1. Images of teachers' roles are internalized from age five years onwards. Even when teacher education programmes try to promulgate a new image of teaching, the school young teachers find themselves in are essentially like the ones in which they were socialized. The new wine is changed when it is poured into the old bottle.

2. Teachers are often reluctant to relinquish teaching repertoires that provide an important source of security for them. Changes in schools that require new content and new repertoires are likely to be met with passive resistance by experienced teachers who have defined for themselves an array of routines they can efficiently employ.

3. The norms of schooling are well established and persistent. What teachers are supposed to be, how children are supposed to behave, what constitutes an appropriate and fair set of expectations for a subject are defined by the norms of schooling. Mechanical metaphors for school change are inappropriate, misconceptualise the problem and undermine genuine change.

4. Teacher isolation inhibits learning from colleagues and fosters ignorance.

5. Decontextualised in-service education weakens its potential usefulness. In-service education without some direct observation of teachers teaching in their own classrooms is not likely to be adequate.

6. Students and their parents usually have conservative expectations of schools. They tend to offer traditional responses to questions about what a good teacher does, what kinds of questions are appropriate for students to ask or how students' learning might be assessed. Practices that violate tradition are often regarded as subversive of high-quality education. It is difficult for schools to exceed in aim, form and content what the public is willing to accept.

7. Empowering teachers is complex. The familiar is often more comfortable than the uncertainty of the unknown. Restructuring schools – especially relieving teachers of some current responsibilities - is likely to require money and so rhetoric may be substituted for change in practice.

8. Schools are structurally fragmented and build artificial barriers between subjects and between teachers.

9. Minor efforts at change are eventually swamped by the factors in the school that do not change. (Eisner, 1992, p.610 sqq)

Eisner proceeds to map five dimensions of schooling that need to be considered when considering reform. They are the *intentional*, the *structural*, the *curricular*, the *pedagogical*, and the *evaluative*. Key questions include:

Intentional: What really counts in school and what intentions are typically not given high priority in school?

Structural: Might subjects, time and roles in schools be organized differently?

Curricular: What alternatives are there to fragmented, collection-type forms of curriculum organisation?

Pedagogical: The classroom is too uncertain a place for recipes. Distinguishing between the intended curriculum and the operational curriculum is important and the pedagogical is a central aspect of school reform, building on each teacher's own ability.

Evaluative: How can assessment instruments be redesigned to reflect what is intended to be learned?

Applied to Transition Year, Eisner's perspectives offer valuable signposts to potential success and possible pitfalls.

To return to the initial point that schools as organisations are different, Sergiovanni suggests that communities are organised around relationships and ideas. They create structures that bond people together in a one-ness, and that bind them to a set of shared values and ideas. (Sergiovanni, 1996, p. 46).

Rudduck and Flutter, drawing on the work of Mitchell and Sackney (2000. p.6), synthesises the change associated with moving to a learning community as:

> ….transformation means moving from a technological model that is concerned with targets, efficiency and hierarchical models of accountability to one that is characterized by 'metaphors of wholeness and connections, diversity and complexity, relationships and meaning, reflection and enquiry, and collaboration and collegiality'. (Rudduck and Flutter, 2004, p.138)

Sergiovanni makes a distinction between beliefs that are 'life-liberating' and those that are 'life-limiting'. The contrast is stark. Community is likely to be built where life-liberating values prevail.

TABLE 2.3 TEACHERS' BELIEFS: LIFE-LIBERATING OR LIFE-LIMITING (AFTER SERGIOVANNI, 1996)

Life-liberating beliefs	Life-limiting beliefs
All students are capable of high attainment (not just the most competent)	Only a few, bright students can achieve at the highest level
Effective teaching involves getting students to do something for themselves	Effective teaching involves doing something to students
You are not expected to understand everything first time	Speed is valued; faster is smarter
Consistent effort is the main determinant of success	Inborn intelligence is the main determinant of success
Mistakes help one learn	Mistakes are a sign of weakness
Good students work together, solicit help for each other	Competition is necessary to bring out the best in students

School curricula and innovation

As a society, the formal education system and individual schools clarify the goals of schooling, decisions are made about appropriate learning experiences. Like schooling itself, curriculum is also a contested topic. Furthermore, as society changes the expectation is that the curriculum changes in response. Ideally, curriculum development should be an ongoing process, though resistance to change is commonplace. As Callan states:

> Changing curriculum and the processes of realising it in the classroom is about changing mind-sets of people, and specifically changing the assumptions and values of powerful social groups that shape the cultural selections that make up curriculum content and shape curriculum practices. (Callan, 2006, p.8)

Gleeson proposes that educational innovation is best understood from the three perspectives identified by House (1981, p18ff), each focusing on different concerns – technological, political and cultural.

TABLE 2.4 PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION, (AFTER GLEESON, 2004A AND HOUSE, 1981)

Concern	TECHNOLOGICAL	POLITICAL	CULTURAL
Focus	Inputs and outputs	Power and authority relationships; negotiation; legitimacy of the authority system	Shared meanings resting on shared values
Key values	Mechanistic processes; economic concerns; efficiency	Negotiating compromises between interest groups	Studying the innovation process itself –its effects and meanings
Teachers	Relatively passive teaching force	One of the interest groups	Reflective practitioners
Evaluation	Bureaucratic		Democratic

Traditionally, the technological approach has been the most dominant, followed by the political perspective. The cultural view is less common. As for change itself, Fullan (1991, p 34), talks of 'deep change' operating at three levels: materials, practice and practitioners' beliefs/values. It is Gleeson's contention that despite a quarter of a century of 'innovation' in Irish schooling, 'little has changed in the culture of our schools or in classroom practice.' Part of the explanation he offers for this is 'loose curriculum discourse'. He argues that the 'distinct though related concepts' of curriculum reform, curriculum innovation, curriculum development and curriculum change are often used as if they were interchangeable. (Gleeson, 2004a, p.105).

The problem of interchangeability arises in the case of TY as the programme illustrates characteristics of each concept. TY is a reform in that it is mandated from the top, an instrument of official policy, albeit as an optional programme. The term 'innovation' is associated with efforts to bring something fresh to curriculum, often by way of experiment. Introducing TY was/is, for many schools, an innovation in that it means moving from a five year cycle to a six year one and offering a course that does not have the very identifiable target of public examinations as in the programmes offered in the other five years of

schooling. TY involves curriculum development, particularly with the freedom given to schools to devise their own programmes. TY also represents 'change' in that the processes advocated for realising the TY curriculum inside and outside the classroom embrace more experiential, learner-centred approaches including a different conceptualisation of the role of the teacher. (Ireland, Department of Education 1993c).

A key question is whether TY can bring about the 'deep change' that Fullan (1991, p.32) speaks about, at the levels of materials, practice and practitioners' beliefs/values.

In addition to the centrality of young people's development and the importance of learning, schools are also profoundly social institutions. One of the first sociologists to look closely at schools described their distinctiveness as follows:

> ……………… the world of school is a social world. Those human beings who live together in the school, though deeply severed in one sense, nevertheless spin a tangled web of interrelationships; that web and the people in it make up the social world of the school. It is not a wide world, but for those who know it it's a world compact with meaning. It is a unique world....' (Waller, 1967, p x)

Many researchers, including Ball, (1987); Blaise and Anderson, (1995), Lynch (1999), Hargreaves (2001), Callan (2006) draw attention to the juxtaposition of proximity and isolation, power and powerlessness, hierarchy and democracy within schools. Understanding the distinct culture of schools – collectively and individually - therefore, is seen as illuminating practice. Culture is especially relevant when it comes to change.

Curriculum Reform and the Irish context

As already stated, the OECD review of the Irish education system (OECD, 1991) identified some particular problems and mapped out an agenda for reform. Second-level schooling was seen as particularly problematic. Echoing some of the concerns voiced by Richard Burke T.D., Minister for Education in the early 1970s, the centrality of curriculum reform is signalled clearly.

In secondary schools, the curriculum problem emerges in its most acute form. The weight of the classical humanist tradition is enormous, not least because of its underpinning of high-status occupations and a way of life which is widely admired even though unattainable by the majority. This dominance is likely to prevail unless the authorities are able to develop either a much more powerful parallel system of technical/vocational schools or a restructured general secondary education curriculum. (OECD, 1991, p 69)

Classical humanism, with its origins in the thinking of Plato and Aristotle, is a knowledge-based curriculum focused towards high culture. Following The Enlightenment, reactions against its excessive rationalism and abstract thought led to a greater emphasis on learning from experience. French revolutionary Rousseau followed by educators like Pestalotzi, Froebel and Montessori promoted a more child-centred, progressive education that values individual freedom. Such thinking, - and that of Piaget - influenced the Plowden Report in the UK and the 1971 Irish Primary School curriculum and its 1999 replacement. American John Dewey brought child-centred learning to a new level and linked his educational philosophy to the wider social and political ideology of democracy. The guidelines for TY[6] (Ireland, Department of Education 1976; CEB, 1986a; Ireland, Department of Education 1993c) incrementally reflect the influence of Dewey and his followers and, as indicated in Chapter 1, the decision to mainstream TY in 1994 can be seen as part of the response to the challenge to restructure the curriculum[7].

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[6] In presenting TY as a curriculum innovation here and in Chapter 1, the (limited) literature indicates how it differs from other initiatives in a number of ways. Many of the curriculum developments referred to in the White Paper (Ireland, Department of Education 1980) were projects well rooted in either the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) in Dublin or in the Shannon based Curriculum Development Centre (CDC). These centres, while in some ways 'provisional' (Trant, 2007), were important advocates for programmes such as the Humanities Project, the Integrated Science Curriculum Innovation Project (ISCIP) and the Senior Certificate. Later, the LCA had a particularly close and productive association with these centres. TY's advocacy has been more problematic, as Burke's 'solo run' (Chapter 1) illustrates. The 1986 CEB guidelines gave it an important boost though that agency had little to say about TY until it began to review Senior Cycle from 2002. A further difference is that while programmes like VPTP1 were well supported by European funding, TY was not. While the DES issued guidelines in 1993 and an evaluation in 1996, advocacy for TY was left to individuals, as well as the TYST, the TYCSS and more recently the SLSS. TY's uncertain and changing 'parenthood' has, at times, resulted in a certain sense of it being an 'educational orphan'.

The OECD Review gave impetus to a number of significant official publications in the subsequent decade that attempted to clarify education policy. The Green Paper *Education for a Changing World* (Government of Ireland, 1992b) and the *Report of the National Education Convention* (Coolahan editor, 1994) laid foundations for the White Paper *Charting Our Education Future* (Government of Ireland, 1995). The latter enunciated the five principles underpinning national educational policy as Pluralism, Equality, Quality, Partnership and Accountability.

Building on the principles set out in the White Paper, *The Education Act* (Government of Ireland, 1998) is a landmark document for a number of reasons. Amazingly, it is the first significant piece of legislation affecting first and second level schools since well *before* the introduction of universal, 'or 'free', secondary education. Secondly, the preamble to the Act makes it clear that education is a public rather than a private good, that it is for the benefit of all citizens and that the system is primarily accountable to students[8]. Thirdly, what might be seen as rhetoric in that preamble is at key stages in this Act and in subsequent legislation[9] translated into meaningful law. Particularly relevant in the 1998 Act is the explicit statement of the functions of schools. Handy and Aitken's (1990, p.34) identification of the 'pile of purposes' comes to mind when one selects some features. According to section 9, 'a recognized school shall provide education to students which is appropriate to their abilities and needs and without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, it shall use its available resources to: *a) ensure that educational **needs**…are **identified and provided** for…*

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[8] The preamble begins: 'An act to make provision in the interests of the common good for the education of every person in the state, including any person with a disability and who has other special educational needs, and to provide generally for primary, post-primary, adult and continuing education and vocational education and training, to ensure that the education system is accountable to students, their parents and the State for the education provided, respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish Society and is conducted in a spirit of partnership between schools, patrons, students, parents, teachers and other school staff, the community served by the school and the State; to provide for the recognition and funding of schools and their management through Boards of Management; to provide for an Inspectorate of schools; to provide for the role and responsibilities of principals and teachers; to establish the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and to make provision for it…'
[9] For example, Welfare Act 2000, Children with Special Educational Needs, 2004.

*b) ensure that the education meets the **requirements of education policy***

*c) ensure that students have access to appropriate **guidance**.....*

*d) promote **moral, spiritual, social and personal development** of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school*

*e) promote **equality** of opportunity......*

*f) promote the development of the **Irish language**.......*

*g) ensure that parents of a student......or ..a student 18... have **access .. to records** kept by that school relating to the progress of that student in his or her education*

*h) in schools ..in Gaeltacht .. contribute to the **maintenance of Irish** as the primary community language*

*i) conduct its activities in **compliance** with.. Regulations.... section 33*

*j) ensure that the needs of personnel involved in management functions and **staff development needs** generally in the school are identified and provided for*

*k) establish and maintain **systems whereby the efficiency and effectiveness of its operations can be assessed**, including the quality and effectiveness of teaching in the school and the attainment levels and academic standards of students*

*l) establish or maintain contact with **other schools** and at appropriate levels throughout the community served by the school*

*m) subject to this Act and in particular Section 15 (2) (d), establish and maintain an **admissions policy** which provides for maximum accessibility to the school.*

The inclusive nature of schooling is striking and can be seen as formal endorsement in law of what became known as the introduction of 'free' education by Donogh O'Malley in 1967[10]. This then is the context of schooling in which the 1994 mainstreaming of TY has to be appreciated.

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[10] As with many important changes in the school system throughout the history of the Irish State, 'top-down' initiatives were initiated by circular letters

Summary

TY needs to be seen in the wider context of schooling. Schooling is characterised by complexity and is organisationally unique, with the centrality of children and young people the key difference. Thus, relationships are at the heart of the schooling process. Schools' 'pile of purposes', their historical evolution, society's expectations of them and their distinct cultures render them robust organisations. Western society is undergoing a major transformation and as society changes, so must schools and the curricula. Internationally, evidence suggests that educational innovations are easy to introduce but difficult to sustain. Bringing about the 'deep change' in the hearts and minds of practitioners that will lead to improved quality of teaching and learning is especially challenging. Similar challenges are associated with recent change and innovation in Ireland. The mainstreaming of TY since 1994 is one of the most ambitious innovations in Irish schooling.

Young People

Young People's Voices

One of the most vivid examples of how childhood and adolescence are socially constructed is seen in how children's voices are heard in a society. When anthropologists Arensberg and Kimball studied families in Co. Clare in the nineteen thirties, they noted children's lack of voice. The found:

> … very silent children. They take little part in the family discussion between older members unless questioned directly. (Arensberg and Kimball, 1948, p.38)

Writers of fiction and memoir since that time confirm how mute children's voices were in Irish homes and schools (e.g. O'Brien 1962; McGahern 1963, 2005; O'Brien 1986; Browne1986; McCabe1995; Deane 1996; Kerrigan1998; Hyland, 2006; McGrath 2007). The widespread availability of television in the nineteen sixties heralded a social revolution within families and was an important contributor to young people finding a greater voice (Jeffers, 1991). Ireland's ratification of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UN,

1989) in 1992 led to more explicit government polices recognising the validity of young people's viewpoints. The consultation leading to the National Children's Strategy (Government of Ireland, 2000c), the setting up of the National Children's Office and the installation of an Ombudsman for Children are high profile indicators of changing expectations. The truths emerging from the Commission to Enquire into Child Abuse (Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, 2003) and *The Ferns Report* (Government of Ireland, 2005) are further painful reminders of what can happen in a society that does not listen to young people's voices. And as Zerubavel (2006), for example, eloquently illustrates silence and denial are conspirators that facilitate incest, alcoholism, corruption or even genocide. While children's voiced are less muted than in the 1930s, Devlin's (2006) findings are worth noting. He found that

> … young people believe themselves to be the subject of stereotypical ideas and images, and of prejudicial and discriminatory treatment based on such ideas and image. (Devlin, 2006, p.63)

Devlin's reporting on young people's beliefs that they are stereotyped and treated unequally by adults in general is more nuanced regarding their experiences of school. He says:

> There were some very positive reports of caring and supportive behaviour, but other accounts of being treated dismissively or harshly or even bullied. The young people in general felt most strongly about not being listened to (or not being believed if their 'story' conflicted with that of an adult) and not having a say in how schools were run. The view of schools councils and similar initiatives were unenthusiastic, and there were experiences of such mechanisms being subjected to vetting by teachers. (Devlin, 2006, p.64)

In societies where young people were seen but not heard, the schooling system reflected and reinforced passivity and compliance. Cusick's participant observation study in a senior class in an American public high school, quoted in Lynch (1989, p. 2), suggests that the most significant implication of the social organisation of the school, from the pupil's perspective, is that it 'provides an enormous amount of time when students are actually required to do little other than be in attendance and minimally compliant'.

Aspirations to listen more to students need to be translated into actions. A major shift in thinking about young people and schooling is required. Rudduck and

Flutter (2004, p.139), contend that school structures, policies and practices have been crafted to ensure no student voice is possible. They believes that a central concern in the transformation of schools into learning communities, must be in altering the way students and teachers engage with learning, recalling Friere's (1970) idea of 'culture circles' in which the voices and experience of learners are heard and valued. Building on Stenhouse's (1975, p.208) belief that only teachers can really change the world of the classroom, first by understanding it, their own experience of curriculum projects that listened to what pupils had to say about teaching, learning and schooling, and Schön's (1983) vision of the reflective practitioner, they emphasise the idea of teacher as researcher. 'Consulting pupils', they say, 'restores to centre stage the key professional relationship of pupils, teachers and learning (Ruddock and Flutter, 2004, p.145). It's a crucial point also for Noddings in her understanding of how moral education plays out, particularly in school. 'Dialogue', she contends, is one of 'the essential components of moral education[11]' (Noddings, 2005, p.22). Taking a Frierean interpretation of 'dialogue' in an educational context, she says:

> Dialogue is open-ended; that is, in a genuine dialogue, neither party knows at the outset what the outcome or decision will be. As teachers and parents, we cannot enter into dialogue with children when we know that our decision is already made… dialogue is a common search for understanding, empathy, or appreciation. It can be playful or serious, logical or imaginative, goal or process oriented, bur it is always a genuine quest for something undetermined at the beginning.' (Noddings, 2005, p 23)

There is anecdotal evidence that Irish parents have modified their approaches to child-rearing significantly in recent decades (see, for example, McWilliams, 2005). If parenting styles have altered greatly, evidence from schools suggests more limited change. The thrust of the Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) syllabus (NCCA, 1996) is to affirm young people's rights and to encourage their voice. The *Stay Safe* programme in Primary Schools and the SPHE programmes at both primary and second level are constructed on the presumption of children's voices being listened to. The *Education Act* (Government of Ireland, 1998), while not making it a legal requirement, advocates the setting up of Student Councils within schools and sends a signal to

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[11] ' Moral education from the perspective of an ethic of caring has four major components: modelling, dialogue, practice and confirmation.' (Noddings, 2005, p.22)

schools of altered circumstances. However, as Lynch and Lodge illustrate, many young people experience a profound lack of respect in schools, noting that

> What is clear from this research is that young people are above all calling for the introduction of democratic institutions and systems in schools that show greater respect for them as individuals with views, wishes and ambitions that are not synonymous with those of adults. (Lynch and Lodge, 1999, p.253)

The TY *Guidelines* (Ireland, Department of Education 1993c) lean strongly towards this sense of listening to young people, of entering into the dialogue Noddings talks about. Within each school, students should be consulted about the programme (*ibid.* p.5). In proposing varied approaches to teaching and learning, 'negotiated learning' heads the list (*ibid.* p.8). Students are also seen as having active roles in assessment and evaluation (*ibid.* p.9)

In this context, the TY *Guidelines'* suggestion that 'the aims and philosophy of TY should permeate the entire school' (Ireland, Department of Education 1993c, p. 2), can be read as juxtaposing TY's democratic, participative, listening impulses with the traditional hierarchical, non-consultative, passive tendencies of much schooling.

Students' attitudes to learning

As key sites for young people's growth and development, student learning has to be at the heart of a school's practice. Students' attitudes to learning are of central importance to the professionals employed to advance their learning. Teachers are keenly aware that there is a major difference between teaching a class of adolescents where the dominant disposition is of interest, enthusiasm and engagement, and one characterised by more reluctant attitudes to learning. Performance in a high-stake public examination, the Leaving Certificate, has long been a valued feature of secondary schooling in Ireland and, understandably, is a central focus in student and teacher motivation (Miller and Kelly 1999; Smyth, 1999; Ireland, Department of Education and Science, 1999b; Lynch and Lodge, 1999). TY, where the learning outcomes are articulated primarily in terms of personal and social development and where there is no

public examination, invites a significant shift in the focus of both student and teacher motivation. Among the questions arising from this situation are: What happens when the heavy motivational blanket of examination achievement is removed? How do student and teacher attitudes towards learning manifest themselves in TY? Is motivation for lifelong learning enhanced or diminished by TY? What can be learned about adolescent motivation by examining the TY experience? There is no shortage of engaging questions!

Student motivation

Reviewing the literature on student motivation, Wigfield, Eccles and Rodriguez, (1998) categorise the various constructs associated with student motivation into two broad groups: firstly, self-perception constructs that includes a sense of one's own competence and agency; secondly, the purposes individuals have for engaging in activities and their interests in and valuing of such activities.

Ability beliefs, that is, how we evaluate our competence to perform particular tasks, are linked to expectancies for success; when individuals have a positive sense of their ability and efficacy to do a task, they are more likely to choose to do that task, persist at it, and maintain their effort. Beliefs about locus of control are also important; Wigfield *et al.* (1998, p.75) point to positive links between internal locus of control – the belief that the individual controls the outcome of an action as distinct from external locus of control where the outcome is determined by other things – and academic achievement. They report how Connell and Wellborn (1991) developed a theoretical framework based on the psychological needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness. When the family, peer and school contexts support children's autonomy, develop their competence, and provide positive relations with others, children's motivation (which Connell and Wellborn conceptualised as *engagement*) will be positive, and they will become fully engaged in different activities such as schoolwork. When one or more of the needs are not met, children will become disaffected. This theory has particular relevance to TY. So also has the distinction threaded through the literature between what has been called 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic'

motivation. When intrinsically motivated we engage in activities for their own sake and out of interest in the activity. This kind of engagement is what Csikzentmihalyi (1990) refers to as 'flow'. 'He describes 'flow' as a state of concentration so focused that it amounts to absolute absorption in an activity where one feels in control of one's actions and of the surrounding environment. In contrast, 'external' motivation involves engaging in activities for instrumental or other reasons, such as receiving a reward. However, various researchers have tended to reject intrinsic/extrinsic as a dichotomy, rather seeing several stages in moving from external to internalised regulation: *external* (regulation coming from outside the individual), *introjected* (internal regulation based on the individual's feelings that he or she should or has to engage in the behaviour); *identified* (internal regulation of behaviour that is based on the utility of that behaviour); and, finally *integrated* (regulation based on what the individual thinks is valuable and important).

Research into 'interest', shows a strong correlation between interest and deep-level learning such as recall of main ideas, coherence of recall, responding to deeper comprehension questions and representation of meaning. Furthermore, research suggests that personal relevance, novelty, activity level and comprehensibility can generate situational interest, a crucial point for teachers. In order words, students' interests can be stimulated by imaginative and appropriate activities, inside and outside classrooms.

Wigfield *et al.* (1998) refer to some of their earlier work to describe how students can value schoolwork. Particularly relevant are four motivational components of the value attached to a particular task: attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost. Attainment value refers to the personal importance attached to doing well in the task. This is linked to the idea of the task as presenting an opportunity to confirm, or otherwise, salient aspects of one's ideal self. Intrinsic value is the enjoyment an individual gets from performing the activity. Utility value is determined by how well a task relates to current and future goals. Finally, 'cost' is estimated in terms of the negative effects of engaging in a task, such as performance anxiety, fear of failure or success as well as the effort needed to succeed and the opportunities lost by making one choice over another.

Research into students' motivational patterns has pointed to a distinction between ego-involved goals and task-motivated goals (Ames, 1992). Those for whom ego-involved goals dominate tend to seek to maximise favourable evaluations of their competence and minimise negative evaluations. People whose main orientation is task-involved tend to focus on mastering tasks and increasing their competence. Questions such as 'Can I outperform others? and 'Will I look smart?' are typical of the former perspective while the latter view poses questions such as ' How can I do this task?' and 'How can I learn?' A third type of goal orientation has also been proposed: work avoidance. Developing those constructs led to a contention that students, where performance or ego-involved goals dominate, try to outperform others and are more likely to engage in tasks they know they can do. Task-involved or mastery orientated students tend to choose more challenging tasks and are more concerned with their own performance. Two caveats need to be entered here. Firstly, Wigfield *et al. (*1998) point to a growing body of researchers who suggest that work avoidance may be a common goal orientation of students. Secondly, they add that this performance-mastery distinction may be applied differentially to different subjects and situations. Nonetheless, the distinctions between orientations have a particular relevance for the organisation of school-based learning.

As children grow and develop, their views of ability, effort and achievement change. Whether orientations towards ego-involved, mastery-involved or goal avoidance dominate seems to depend on numerous variables, including how much the classroom environment is competitive/co-operative. TY, occurring immediately following the JC examination, offers adolescents a particular opportunity to re-evaluate their views of their own ability and potential.

Peer relationships and adolescent learning

Peer relationships also connect with motivation. Wigfield *et al.* (1998, p. 99) report that a number of studies point to children who are accepted by their peers

and have good social skills, do better in school and have more positive motivation.

Furthermore, increased social interaction among students can lead to communities of learners rather than a group of competing individuals (Newman cited in Wigfield *et al.* 1998, p101). The ego-involved, mastery-involved distinction has also been shown to impact on students' inclinations to seeking appropriate help with their work. Again, a competitive environment heightens the sense that seeking help is a sign of being unable to complete a problem, an admission that students often find hard to make. Socially rejected and highly aggressive children are at risk of poorer achievement and motivation.

Adolescents at the TY stage spend extensive unsupervised time with their peers. Berndt and Keefe (1996) identify a number of factors at play in the relationship between motivation and peer relationships. Firstly children, want and need social approval, particularly from others whom they like and/or look up to. To gain social approval, they will do things their friends do. Whether this has positive or negative effects on achievement and motivation, depends on who their friends are. If their friends are high achievers, the effects might be positive; if their friends are low achievers, problems might arise. Secondly, acting like one's friends is a very strong characteristic of early adolescence. Thirdly, friends provide important reference points about one's own competences. Indeed, Berndt and Keefe suggest that sometimes children compete with their own friends in order to enhance their sense of self. Ability-grouping practices can have a major impact on students' motivation, in part through the peer group.

Wigfield *et al.* (1998) conclude with many unresolved questions. For example, if learning is a truly social phenomenon and learning cannot be separated from its context, what is the role of self-perception in motivating students' behaviour? Motivation may be situation specific.

Roeser, Eccles and Sameroff (2000) report that when school experiences 'fit' students' needs, successful development is enhanced but that the opposite is also true. Their largest group, in a sample of 945, were well-adjusted adolescents who

reported a non-comparative, non-competitive school environment that focused on improvement and mastery, autonomy, meaningful work and caring relationships between teachers and students. However, the second largest group consisted of young people with multiple problems who perceived school as antithetical to their needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness. Integrating schooling into young people's social and emotional development requires teachers 'to find ways to include students' voices in the learning process' and 'to be open to the interests and prior knowledge of the students so that they can craft lessons that touch meaningful life events, experiences, and questions that occupy adolescents during this exciting period of the life course'. (*ibid.* p.446)

Young people in classroom contexts

Studies on teacher effectiveness tend to stress the centrality of a positive classroom climate and of how well teachers modify and change their strategies as lessons proceed (Day *et al.* 2007). The link with motivation is also clear:

> Though educators rightfully emphasise achievement, they should also think of motivating their students and awakening a love of learning for its own sake. Affectionately remembered classes sustain interest in learning in the workplace and over a lifetime … well-organised classrooms foster responsibility, humaneness and mutual respect – the very social skills students needs to participate productively in our civic society. (Rudduck *et al.* 1997, p.46)

Commenting on research into classroom climate and students' motivation, Wigfield *et al.* (1998) highlight the interaction of a variety of factors, for example, that student satisfaction, personal growth, and achievement are maximised only when teacher warmth and supportiveness are accompanied by efficient organisation, stress on academics and provision of focused, goal-oriented lessons. Classroom climate can be a function of school climate. In that regard, the work of Maehr and Midgely (1996) offers some pointers. They suggest that school policies and practices such as those promoting ability tracking, comparative performance evaluations, and ego-focus rather than mastery-focus undermine both student and teacher motivation. They propose that schools should consciously emphasise mastery-focus goals. Ames (1984) looked at how different goal structures within classrooms impact on students'

motivation, in particular individualised structures, competitive structures and co-operative structures. She found that, under competitive conditions, winners' ability beliefs are enhanced and losers' diminished. With individualistic structures, the focus is more on mastery, though, there is little concern for others. Co-operative goals structures foster shared efforts and the group outcome is especially relevant.

However, while co-operative learning structures seem to promote persistence, self-regulation, intrinsic motivation and goal orientation, it is not without its challenges. Extensive planning is needed and there are questions as to whether it suits learning in some subject areas more than others. Group composition can also be critical; good practice suggests ensuring a mix, and frequently changing the mix, of ability, gender and race.

It is not clear exactly how co-operative learning impacts positively on student motivation and achievement. Slavin (1996) proposed a four dimensional model involving motivational, social, cognitive and academic outcomes. According to the motivational perspective, students know that the only way they will achieve their own goals is through the group and, so, a 'group incentive' develops that spurs motivation. Thus, students will tutor each other, engage in peer modelling and provide other cognitive elaborations. Social cohesion will result within the group. Thus, for Slavin, motivation is the key. Ames (1992) uses the acronym TARGET to assist teachers in constructing classrooms that focus on mastery-oriented goals rather than on ego-oriented ones. The framework is set out below:

TABLE 2.5 CONSTRUCTING CLASSROOMS – TARGET – (AFTER AMES, 1992)

T asks	*Tasks* that are diverse, interesting and challenging foster task-involved goals, as do tasks that students think they have a reasonable chance of completing.
A uthority	When the *authority* in the classroom is structured so that students have opportunities to participate in decision-making and take responsibility for their own learning, students are more task involved.
R ecognition	*Recognition* of students' efforts (rather than their ability) and giving all students (rather than only the 'best') a chance to achieve recognition foster task-involved goals.
G rouping	Task goals are fostered when co-operative *grouping* is used and students have a chance to work with a heterogenous mix of classmates.

E valuate	When teachers *evaluate* students' progress and mastery rather than just outcomes, and provide students with opportunities to improve, task-mastery is more likely
T ime	*Time* refers to the pace of the instruction, also how much time individual students have to complete their work, and how students plan and organise their work schedules.

The relationship of rewards to motivation is complex. According to some researchers, Wigfield *et al.* (1998) report that comparative rewards systems foster ego-goal orientation and, conversely, can further demotivate 'losers'. Wigfield *at al* (1998, p.96) refer to a number of studies that suggest how, for students who are already intrinsically motivated, the use of rewards can undermine students' sense of control and autonomy over their achievement outcomes and thus reduce intrinsic motivation. They quote a rather compelling phrase about such effects from the work of Lepper, Greene and Nisbett (1973) that is 'turning play into work'. Such perspectives point towards the need for careful and judicious use of extrinsic rewards in classroom settings.

The predominant influence of public examinations in shaping the climate of Irish classrooms has been documented by Lyons, Close, Boland, Lynch and Sheerin (2003) and by Smyth *et al.* (2003, 2005, 2007). The removal of this major focus in TY, poses questions as to how classroom climate might be altered.

Relevance, imagination and challenge

The need to provide young people with significant learning experiences is a dominant theme in the work of Hargreaves *et al.* (1996, p.80). A basic principle of their work is that if the prime purpose of education for young adolescents is to provide curriculum, teaching and other services based on their needs and characteristics, it is important to understand the nature of adolescence.
Based on this, they identify three common problems in the construction of curricula for adolescents. They are:
▪ the problem of relevance;
▪ the problem of imagination;
▪ the problem of challenge.

Citing research from Canada and Australia that asserts that 'it is curriculum that is responsible for much of what we call the dropout problem', Hargreaves *et al.* (1996) warn against curricula that are watered-down, fragmented, or do little to engage with students' interests, enthusiasms, talents or future lives. For schools developing TY programmes, 'relevance', 'imagination' and 'challenge' could become three critical watchwords. (Jeffers, 2007a, p. 295)

However, Hargreaves *et al.* continue, citing the work of Egan (1988) and Woods (1993) that 'relevance' can sometimes degenerate into mediocre, descriptive studies of tedious topics on self, family and community. The contention is that *imagination* is one of the most neglected aspects of curriculum planning, that curriculum is too often presented as a fact, not as a problem, that young people are fascinated by imagination. In this view, storytelling 'should be at the heart of teaching, not in terms of what the teacher actually says, but in terms of how the learning is structured' (Hargreaves *et al.* . 1996 p.82).

Furthermore, for example in Martin (2006, p.73), the link between high but achievable expectations is one of the most consistently cited factors associated with positive student outcomes. *Challenge* within the learning experience needs to be real and significant and promote the kind of engagement, as mentioned above, that Csikzentmihalyi (1990) refers to as 'flow'.

Young voices at the millennium

An Irish study, by Tuohy and Cairns[12] (2000), gives some indication of how relevance, imagination and challenge might operate for young people. While the primary focus of their study was to understand the religious and spiritual culture of young people, it also illuminates attitudes to education among the group. The researchers note:

> When asked about how well they got on at school, well over half the interviewees focused on friendships with peers. (*ibid* p.113).

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[12] Based on interviews with 159 young people aged 17 years to 23 conducted at 20 locations throughout Ireland. (Tuohy and Cairns, 2000)

When talking about academic programmes, TY and LC were the two most commonly mentioned.

> Most of those who had experienced the Transition Year spoke very favourably of it. In particular, they focused on the social development they had experienced, and on the benefits of work experience in the local community (*ibid* p.118)

The researchers also refer to 'a number of interviewees who seemed to regret doing the Transition Year. (*ibid*. p.118). Cairns and Tuohy also identify extra-curricular activities such as sport, drama, and debating as important determinants 'of the atmosphere of the school'. (*ibid.* p.119). Furthermore, the interviewees in that study also attached high importance to the nature of their relationships with teachers, sometimes negative, sometimes positive.

In their study of second-year students, Smyth *et al.*(2006) asked the young people about the kind of teaching and lessons which help them learn. While the most frequently mentioned was 'that the teacher explaining thing clearly', the authors remark:

> The importance of the informal climate in the school and particularly the relationship between teachers and students within the classroom environment is also crucial in enhancing student learning (*ibid.* p.194).

These points are further reminders of the centrality of relationships in adolescents' learning processes, a key concept in this thesis.

The formative influence of Carl Rogers

When learning to be a guidance counsellor in the 1970s, Carl Rogers was a formative influence on this researcher. One of the striking features about revisiting Rogers' writing is that he said teaching was overrated. Closer inspection reveals that he was making a point about the importance of context. Teaching, which Rogers actually said was as 'a relatively unimportant and vastly overvalued activity', (Rogers, 1969, p.103) makes sense in an unchanging environment.

However, a continually changing environment characterizes the modern world. If we are to survive, contends Rogers, the goal of education, should be the facilitation of change and learning. He contends that 'the most socially useful learning in the modern world is the learning of the process of learning, a continuing openness to experience and incorporation into one self of the process of change' (*ibid* p.163).

Along a continuum of meaning, Rogers divided learning into two general types. At one end of the scale he locates the learning of nonsense syllables such as baz, ent, nep, arl, lud and the like.[13] He remarks: 'because there is no meaning involved, these syllables are not easy to learn and are likely to be forgotten quickly' (*ibid*, p.3). He contended that much of the material presented to students in the classroom, has, for the student, the same perplexing meaningless quality as the list of nonsense syllables. In contrast, at the other end of the spectrum is 'significant, meaningful, experiential learning'. This, he maintains, has the following defining features: personal involvement; self-initiated; pervasive; is evaluated by the learner; its essence is meaning. Rogers believed that all teachers and educators prefer to facilitate this experiential and meaningful type of learning, rather than the nonsense syllable type. Despite this, he saw schools as locked into approaches to learning that make 'significant learning improbable if not impossible' (*ibid*, p.5).

John Dewey's perspectives on learning

Rogers' work carries resonances with, and indebtedness to Dewey. Dewey (1902, 2001) offers useful insights into teaching a subject or a branch of learning. A subject, he argues, 'must be restored to the experience from which it has been abstracted.' He sees two aspects to every subject: scientific and pedagogic. The scientific dimension involves gaining a thorough understanding of the subject matter. What concerns the teacher is:

> ….. the ways in which the subject may become part of experience; what there is in the child's present that is usable with reference to it;

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[13] Rogers took these 'nonsense syllables' from a series of psychological tests popular at the time.

how such elements are to be used; how his own knowledge of the subject-matter may assist in interpreting the child's needs and doings, and determine the medium in which the child should be placed in order that his (sic) growth may be properly directed. (Dewey, 2001, p.117)

For Dewey, the teacher's primary concern is not with the subject matter as such, 'but with the subject matter as a related factor in a total and growing experience. Thus to see it is to psychologise it'. Then, in a point greatly relevant to second-level teaching and how we conceptualise teachers' work and professional identity, he says:

It is the failure to keep in mind the double aspect subject matter which causes the curriculum and child to be set against each other… (*ibid.* p.117)

Such failures – when the material is not translated into life-terms- Dewey continues, result in material being experienced as dead and barren; it does not generate motivation and the really thought-provoking dimensions of the subject are obscured. (*ibid.* p.118 sqq.*)

It seems that many subjects in JC and LC are experienced in ways that suggest an undue focus on subject-content, rather than on relevant pedagogy. TY – liberated from the examination treadmill – presents the opportunity to engage with pedagogy along the lines suggested by Dewey.

Friere and the banking metaphor

In his analysis of teacher-student relationships, Friere (1999, p.52) paints a bleak picture of the teacher as narrating subject and students as patient, listening objects. His conclusion is that teachers either talk about reality as if it was motionless, static, compartmentalized and predictable or else expound on topics alien to students' existential experience. This view sees the task of teaching as to fill students with contents that are detached from reality, disconnected from 'the totality that engendered them and could give them significance.' In such situations, says Friere, 'words are emptied of their concreteness and become a

hollow, alienated and alienating verbosity.' (*ibid*, p.52). He finds 'banking' an effective metaphor to describe his critique:

> Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits that the students patiently receive, memorize and repeat. This is the banking concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful enquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world and with each other. (*ibid*, p.53)

Kolb and experiential learning

Kolb is a further influential theorist who builds on Dewey's legacy and whose work is relevant to TY. As learning is a continuous process grounded in experience, there are therefore, for Kolb, important educational implications. As he puts it, 'all learning is relearning' (Kolb, 1984, p.28). Here he points to the temptation for teachers to think of learners' minds as 'being blank as the paper on which we scratch our outline.' The contrary is the case. He says:

> Everyone enters every learning situation with more or less articulate ideas about the topic at hand. We are all psychologists, historians, and atomic physicists. It is just that some of our theories are more crude and incorrect that others. But to focus solely on the refinement and validity of these theories misses the point. The important point is that the people we teach have held these beliefs whatever their quality and that until now they have used them whenever the situation called for them to be atomic physicists, historians or whatever. (*ibid.* p.29)

Consequently, for Kolb, the educator's job involves implanting new ideas but also disposing of and modifying old one. In a point relevant to teaching TY students but also appropriate for teachers of TY, he remarks that resistance to

new ideas can stem from them being in conflict with old beliefs. Then, in a key point for all educators he asserts:

> If the education process begins by bringing out the learner's beliefs and theories, examining and testing them, and then integrating the new, more refined ideas into the person's belief systems, the learning process will be facilitated. (*ibid.* p.29)

Kolb's view of experiential learning is associated in very practical ways with work experience, mini-company and community service activities such as YSI. Bearing in mind Dewey's point about 'psychologizing it', Kolb's relevance throughout TY is great.

Gardner and the theory of multiple intelligences

Over the past two decades, Gardner's (1984, 1993) work on the concept of multiple intelligences has had a particular impact on the thinking of educators worldwide. The implications of Gardner's thinking on how teachers conceptualize children's differences were recognized by the Transition Year Support Service and many of the presentations to school staffs from 1994 onwards included extensive reference to Gardner's insights. The optimism underpinning Gardner's views resonated with the Transition Year concept.

Cuban's (2004) assessment of the twenty-year impact of multiple intelligences (MI) on schooling offers a particular perspective on the implementation of change. He asserts

> MI has had the greatest influence on educators' beliefs and talk about differences in children's intelligence, moderate to high influence on the formal curriculum and instructional materials, and least influence on mainstream teaching and assessment practices (Cuban, 2004, p.141).

Cuban points to Gardner's own observations that teachers can engage with MI superficially without changing their classroom practice. At a wider level, he cites the varied influence of MI as an example of 'the substantial slippage between pervasive policy talk, partial policy adoption, and little policy implementation'

(Cuban, 2004, p.143). Cuban focuses on the teacher as gatekeeper of changes, highlighting the conflicting demands of coping with crowded classrooms while creating individual classroom relationships, covering academic content while promoting depth of understanding by each student, and having to socialize students into community values while nurturing creative and independent thought, all within the confines of a curriculum divided into chunks, classrooms with limited space and relatively short time periods. Cuban's sobering remarks draw attention to the wider social and political contexts that sustain school practices, not least schools' role in underpinning values of competitive individualism.

Learning to learn

The influence of some of these seminal thinkers is evident in two major studies commissioned by the US and the UK governments. These also include important recent insights from neuroscience about how the brain works. For TY, and indeed, for the totality of the second level system both *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School* (Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 2000) *About Learning* (Demos[14], 2005) offer a freshness in articulating how schools might re-imagine their roles. In both cases supporting young people 'learning how to learn' is identified as an urgent priority. The UK study articulates the mission of schools in today's world thus.

> What happens in school should enhance students' capacities to learn and their motivation to learn. When this happens, students succeed and are prepared for lifelong learning in their personal development, in the workplace and in the community. When it does not, students pay a personal and social price for the resulting disadvantage' (Demos, p.4).

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[14] The Demos Report '*About Learning – Report of the Working Group'* was commissioned by the UK Minister for School Standards. David Hargreaves of Cambridge University chaired the group and membership included , three headteachers, Jackie Beere, Maggie Swindells and Derek Wise and three cognitive scientists Charles Desforges, Usha Goswani and David Wood, as well as two members of the Demos staff, Matthew Horne and Hannah Lownsbrough. Demos is an NGO organised around the themes of democracy, learning, enterprise, quality of life and global change.

In the American study, one can almost hear the voices of Dewey and Kolb in one of the findings when they emphasise that students come to the classroom with preconceptions about how the world works. If their initial understanding is not engaged, they may fail to grasp the new concepts and information that are taught, or they may learn them for purposes of a test but revert to their preconceptions outside the classroom. Furthermore, Bransford *et al*. conclude that to develop competence in an area of inquiry, students must: (a) have a deep foundation of factual knowledge, (b) understand facts and ideas in the context of a conceptual framework, and (c) organize knowledge in ways that facilitate retrieval and application. A third key finding is that a 'metacognitive' approach to instruction can help students learn to take control of their own learning by defining learning goals and monitoring their progress in achieving them (Bransford *et al.* . 2000).

Having surveyed current literature regarding learning, the Demos group observes that

> ….very different words are being used to mean the same thing, and different writers employ the same words when in fact they mean different things[15] (Demos, 2005, p.6).

They also make a case for progress by combining research evidence with what they call 'practice evidence'. The Demos group notes the emergence of new terminology about learners[16] and 'learning styles' and warns that not only do many of these descriptors rest on a weak evidence base, but that they are sometimes used in ways to label students in ways reminiscent of discredited notions of fixed and inherited intelligences.

With echoes of TY's aspiration to 'self-directed learners' (Ireland, Department of Education 1993c, p.2), both Bransford *et al.* and the Demos study advocate learning environments that are:

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[16] These include activists, theorists, pragmatists, reflectors, divergers, convergers, assimilators, accommodators, verbalisers, imagers, analytics, holists, analyists, changers, realists, visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic. (Demos, 2005, p.11)

Learner centred – recognizing the knowledge, skills and attitudes that the student brings as starting points; an emphasis on diagnostic teaching; acknowledging that students construct their own meanings.

Knowledge centred – engages with the 'big ideas' of a subject; engages in teaching for understanding.

Assessment centred – strong on formative feedback.

Community centred – the classroom is not seen in isolation.

Opening Minds

The *Opening Minds* project (Bayliss, 1999) proposed a curriculum consisting of five broad categories:

- Competences for Learning
- Competences for Citizenship
- Competences for Relating to People
- Competence for Managing Situations
- Competences for Managing Information (Bayliss, 1999, p.18).

Within each category, a number of individual competences are expressed in terms of what school students could achieve having progressed through the curriculum. For example, the six competences under 'Relating to People' are:

- Understand how to relate to other people in varying contexts in which they find themselves, including those where they managed, or are managed by others; and how to get things done.
- Understand how to operate in teams, and their own capacities for filling different team roles.
- Understand how to develop other people, whether as peer or teacher.
- Have developed a range of techniques for communicating by different means, and understand how and when to use them.
- Have developed competence in managing personal and emotional relationships.
- Understand, and be able to use, varying means of managing stress and conflict.

Summary

This section began by focusing on the learning needs of mid-adolescents and moved on the some important theorists whose work offers pointers to how such needs might be met through a TY curriculum. However, as seen in Chapter 1, TY's development in the 1990s took place in the context of many other changes and it is commonplace to characterize that decade as one of unprecedented change. Gleeson (2004, p.104) challenges this view, questioning how much change has actually taken place at the level of classroom practice. For this researcher, that question can also be re-formulated as to what extent are TY providers driven by concern for relevance, imagination and challenge and how much do they integrate the ideas of theorists such as Rogers, Dewey, Friere and Kolb into their practice. To pose that question implies a strong sense of agency on the part of teachers.

Granville (2005) observes that curriculum change in post-primary education today is largely a phenomenon prescribed by the central authorities. This change, led from the centre can, he argues, marginalize 'curriculum development' where the teacher is seen as

> … an instrument of 'delivery', a relay post between the policy-makers and the learner. The space for discretionary judgment of the professional can become quite restricted in such a system (Granville, 2005, p.47).

This underlying thrust is hugely relevant to TY. As 'curriculum content is a matter of selection and adaptation by the individual school' (Ireland, Department of Education 1993c, p.5), then curriculum development has to be a central feature of the TY programme. If the dominant policy direction is going the opposite way, its impact may be not only to dampen innovation in TY but also to legitimate resistance.

School Leadership

Various researchers draw attention to the role played by schools' leadership, particularly principals, in the implementing of innovations in schools. Sarason (1996, p.77) reports how 'the active support of principals' is one of three elements in a school's organisational climate that enable the implementation and continuation of innovation[17].

> The importance of the principal to both short- and long-run effects of innovations can hardly be overstated. The principal's unique contribution to implementation lies not in 'how to do it' advice better offered by project directors, but in giving moral support to the staff and in creating an organisational climate that gives the project 'legitimacy.' (Sarason, 1996, p.77)

A telling phrase encapsulates the role: all told, the principal amply merits the title 'the gatekeeper of change' (*ibid.* p.77).

The burgeoning literature on school leadership tends to reinforce this image and new teachers are likely to feel more secure in trying out new ideas when they know they have the active support of the principal (Sergiovanni, 1996; Fullan, 2001; MacBeath, 2006). Strong commitment to values and ideals they believe important characterises successful leaders according to Sergiovanni, (1996, p.10) while Starratt (1993, p.21) identifies many as 'contemplative, meditative people'. The terminology used to identify dimensions of leadership varies but sense-making, building collegiality and high standards are among the consistent themes.

TABLE 2.6 DIMENSIONS OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Sergiovanni (1996) Leadership for the Schoolhouse *Nine tasks for principals as leaders*	Leithwood (1998) Transformational School Leadership *Eight dimensions of leadership*	Fullan (2005) Leading in a culture of change *Leaders will increase effectiveness if they concentrate on five components*	MacBeath (2006) Leadership for Learning	Tuohy (2006) Challenges for Leadership *Three goals of school leadership and the tasks associated with these goals*

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[17] Report on the Rand Studies in the US, the other two factors are the quality of working relationships among teachers and the effectiveness of project directors.

1.Purposing : shared visions; moral voice *2.Maintaining harmony*: roles and responsibilities *3.Institutionalising values:* procedure and structure *4.Motivating:* new and established *5.Managing:* day-to-day running *6.Explaining:* linking to the big picture *7.Enabling:* providing support, removing obstacles *8.Modeling:* purposes and values in thought, word and actions *9. Supervising:* overview to ensure school is meeting commitments	1. Building school vision 2. Establishing school goals 3. Providing intellectual stimulation 4.Offering individualized support 5. Modeling best practices and important organisational goals 6. Demonstrating high performance expectations 7. Creating a productive school culture 8. Developing structures to foster participation in school decisions *They add four management dimensions:* • *staffing,* • *instructional support,* • *monitoring school activities,* • *community focus*	1. Acting with moral purpose 2. Understanding the change process 3. Relationship building 4. Knowledge building 5. Coherence making *All of the above five are united in the personal characteristic of 'the energy-hopefulness-enthusiasm constellation'*	1. Leadership has a learning focus 2. Leadership creates conditions favourable for learning 3. Dialogue is central to leadership for learning 4. Leadership for Learning practice requires a sharing of leadership 5. Leadership for Learning means being accountable	1. Meaning – common vision 2. Community – working together and relationships 3. Excellence – standards in personal, academic, behavioural and extra-curricular achievements

The views of schools as organisation already discussed in this chapter have a particularly strong impact on the conduct of leadership. Handy and Aitken's concern with so little time for management, Sergiovanni's (1996, p.160) description of schools as 'managerially loose and culturally tight' and Lortie's egg-crate image of the school all serve to highlight some of the restrictions on leadership in an organisation that is 'different'. A particular problem, as Sarason (1996) among others, emphasises is how to bring about change in classroom practice. Sergiovanni suggests one way for school leaders to, as it were, shift the discussion is to change the metaphor:

> Deep changes in schools …may well require that the basic metaphor
> for the school itself be changed from formal organisation or market
> to community (Sergiovanni, 2005, p.313)

How school leaders go about their tasks in general, but especially the initiation, implementation and routinizing or institutionalizing of an innovation is highly political. Ball (1987) and Blase and Anderson (1995) explicate the micro-political nature of schools. As Ball remarks 'in no other institution are notions of hierarchy and equality, democracy and coercion forced to co-exist in the same close proximity (Ball, 1987, p.15). Hannan, in his review of schools as organisations and his knowledge of the Irish system said what struck him most was 'the importance of goal clarity and of goal commitment' (Hannan, 1989, p.29).

Recent literature on school leadership suggests the emerging importance of distributed leadership in schools. Spillane, for example, indicates the need to look at leadership roles other than the principal's. He says

> Heroic epics typically equate school leadership with school principals and their valiant actions. While other leaders are sometimes features in these accounts, they are usually cast in minor, supporting roles. Vital though the school principal is, school leadership does not begin and end with the person in the principal's office (Spillane, 2006, p.5).

Harris and Muijs (2005) define distributed leadership as:

> Giving teachers the opportunity to lead and take responsibility for the areas of change most important to the school … this form of leadership necessarily requires relinquishing the idea of structure as control and viewing structure as a vehicle for empowering others (Harris and Muijs, 2005, p.14).

The TYCSS (2000b) survey offers evidence of how co-ordinators perceive and execute their responsibilities and how the TY co-ordinator can be viewed as a distinct manifestation of distributed leadership in Irish schools.

In a study of principals in voluntary secondary schools in Ireland, Leader and Boldt (1994), found respondents to by very committed to their schools, spending much of their time on low value tasks, and generally over-worked and poorly prepared. Many believed that they had to;

> … take responsibility for everything, with the result that valuable
> time which should have been devoted to perceived priorities such as
> curriculum development, was squandered on a multiplicity of menial
> tasks (*ibid,* p.24).

Furthermore, in many cases principals saw their role as 'requiring their direct involvement in all activities other than what happens in the classrooms' (*ibid.* p.67). They found that while aspiring to be 'instructional leaders', finding time for curriculum development and staff development was difficult *(ibid.* p.78)

More recently, an OECD report (2007, p.63) concluded that when viewing the role of principal as involving management/administration on the one hand and 'learning centred leadership' on the other, the reality is that the principal's work 'is skewed towards the former'. This bias is likely to impact negatively on principals' engagement with TY. However, as Evans asks, why should anyone take an initiative seriously if the leader doesn't? He also contends that:

> Leaders who are followed are authentic; that is, they are
> distinguished not by their techniques or styles but by their integrity
> and their savvy. Integrity is a fundamental consistency between
> personal beliefs, organisational aims, and working behaviour
> (Evans,1996, p.184).

Teachers

Teaching

Underlying a teacher's approach to innovation is how s/he views the curriculum. TY invites a school to decide what knowledge from society's intellectual, moral, aesthetic, social, emotional and technical traditions –curriculum content - should be passed on (Ireland, Department of Education 1993c, p.5). Of particular relevance to teachers in TY is how understanding is best advanced. The process approach to curriculum emphasises interaction and dialogue between student and teacher (Trant, 2007, p.139). Dunne describes the art of teaching as the ability to engage students in a reflective conversation on what it means to practice the craft they are learning. He says:

It is through participation in conversations that arise in the context of focused tasks that people truly develop their repertoires of thinking, feeling, speaking and acting as well as reading and writing. Creating contexts that elicit and sustain such conversations is the great challenge for schools. And the great art for teachers is to be responsible not only to the opportunities and demands of the specific practice but also to the needs, aptitudes and difficulties of particular pupils. It is the latter requirement that makes them teachers, that is to say people competent not only in the specific practices that give substance to education, but also in the peculiar practice that is teaching itself (Dunne, 1995, p.79).

TY presents teachers with opportunities to suggest curriculum content and to create the conversations Dunne talks about. This is also challenging, not least because so much of what happens in the other five years is predictable and often routinised.

Teachers and innovation

Unless teachers themselves believe in an innovation and feel a strong commitment to it, they are unlikely to implement it. This is a persistent theme in much of the research literature regarding innovation and educational change. Sarason, for example, states that:

> Educational change depends on what teachers do and think – it's as simple and as complex as that (Sarason, 1982, p 77).

Eisner makes the case that established teachers are unlikely to opt for something that involves significant change to their established patterns of behaviour:

> … familiar teaching repertoires provide economy of effort; hence changes in schools that require new content and repertoire are likely to be met with passive resistance by experienced teachers who have defined for themselves an array of routines they can efficiently employ (Eisner, 1992, p.612).

Fullan remarks that :

> Educational reform will never amount to anything until teachers become simultaneously and seamlessly inquiry oriented, skilled reflective and collaborative professionals (Fullan, 1991, p.326).

Callan, based on work with schools in Ireland, adds a further perspective

> … there is a tendency for individual teachers to excuse their non-involvement in new programmes on the basis of the absence of adequate supports whether in the form of money or proper school management (1997, p. 27).

Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington and Gu (2007) return to the centrality of teachers in innovation and reform. They state:

> No educational reform has achieved success without teachers committing themselves to it; no school has improved without the commitment of teachers; and although some students learn despite their teachers, most learn because of them – not just because of what and how they teach, but, because of who they are as people (Day *et al*. 2007, p.1).

House compares educational innovation with household innovation. 'The teacher's power in educational innovation is that he can veto for himself' *(sic)* (House, 1974, p.67) A particular difficulty, he contends, arises from the relative professional isolation of teachers. A heavy teaching load confines teachers to classrooms where access to new ideas and innovations is relatively restricted. Even within the school itself teachers have limited professional face-to-face contact with other adults.

House (*ibid.* p.71) asks: what is the reward structure for teachers who engage with innovation? He answers his question by drawing attention to the 'flatness' of the reward structure. When earnings are tied to years of service, where professional advancement often involves leaving the classroom, he questions why people might innovate. Marginal increases in resources, slight increases in chances of promotion or possible greater student enthusiasm don't appear to be massive incentives.

In an observation that carries strong resonances with those who pioneered TY (and other curriculum innovations) in their schools, he says:

> The personal costs of trying new innovations are often high, however, and seldom is there any indication that innovations are worth the investment. Innovations are acts of faith. They require that

one believe that they will ultimately bear fruit and be worth the personal investment, often without the hope of an immediate return. Costs are also high. The amount of energy and time required to learn new skills or roles associated with the new innovation is a useful index to the magnitude of the resistance. The necessity of relearning acts as a deterrent. New skills make old skills obsolete, and there comes a time when it is no longer worth the effort of learning new skills to master the innovation (House, 1974, p 73)

Teachers' resistance to innovation

In attempting to understand resistance to innovation, House focuses on teachers' limited sense of control. There are many features of the teaching environment that the teacher does not control, including low motivated students, relatively low esteem within society and the limited rewards already mentioned. The teacher does have control over what happens in her/his own classroom. Resistance to innovation can be an exercise in power. He talks of 'negative incentives' noting that

> … lecture and recitation have survived for so long as instructional strategies in the face of numerous efforts to change them there must be positive benefits from their employment (*ibid.* p.79).

He develops this point when he says

> … (the major point is that) traditional instruction is a positively organized strategy to deal with the classroom situation, and it is perceived as having strong positive benefits. Innovation, of course, offers benefits, but these must compete with the benefits offered by traditional instruction (*ibid.* p.81)

One consequence of House's analysis, he suggests, is the importance of 'ambitious teachers' for an innovation as they 'see the investment of relearning as worthwhile for their future' (*ibid*. p.76). By 'future', he indicates that he is referring to the dual motivation that he sees as driving teachers: greater professional achievement and satisfaction within the classroom and the desire for promotion. The indication is also that ambitious teachers – those seeking 'status and power' - may deliberately associate themselves with innovations, not necessarily because of any great belief in the innovation.

House also observes a difference between what he refers to as 'variation' or small-scale change (presumably like an adjustment with the prescribed material in a syllabus) and a 're-orientation'. The latter involves a fundamental change, including shifts in the power structure, articulating a perspective that has been reinforced by Sarason, Barth, Fullan, Ball, Callan and Hargreaves among others. He says,

> Large-scale change cannot occur without some realignment, and not only are new goals, values, and power structures necessary, but the cognitive structure must also be changed. People must 'see' things differently (House, 1974, p.77).

Writing about the experiences of various educational innovations in North America, Datnow (2002, p.218) draws attention to the importance of context. Recalling the phrase 'mutual adaptation' of innovations, first coined by Berman and McLaughlin (1978) she emphasises that such a process is both inevitable and desirable. Reform implementation, she notes, involves an active and dynamic interaction those driving the reform and 'the social, political and organisational life of the school (*ibid*. p.219). Datnow herself introduces the term 'co-construction' to describe her view that

> The causal arrow of change travels in multiple directions among active participants in all domains of the system and over time (*ibid,* p.219).

She contends that the multidimensionality emphasis distinguishes the co-construction perspective from technically driven, unidirectional conceptions of innovation and reform. She found that once reforms arrived in schools they were 'modified at school sites in response to the constraints, circumstances and ideologies of local educators (*ibid*. p. 220). In particular, teachers' belief systems were found to be critical. She observes:

> When reform elements conflicted or were unclear, educators sometimes resisted these elements outright or they made adaptations. Most often, educators simply molded the reforms in ways that made sense with their professional knowledge (Datnow, 2002, p. 223).

One of the paradoxes arising from House's (1974) emphasis on 'personal contact' and advocacy is that it can also work in the opposite direction and generate resistance. Evans captures this problem well when he remarks in what could be a useful piece of advice to TY co-ordinators in particular:

> Having a strong commitment to a particular reform, even having the authority to force people to adopt it, does not guarantee successful innovation. On the contrary, it can prove counterproductive. The conviction of an advocate, even a powerful one, inspires resistance if it simply dismisses the inevitable dilemmas of implementation. Being heavily committed makes one less likely to establish the lengthy procedures vital to implementation, less amenable to modifications and less tolerant of the unavoidable delays and setbacks that ensue as others struggle to adopt the change. (Evans, 1996, p.16)

The complexity of teachers' work

The complexity of teachers work is not easy to summarise. The attempt in the DEMOS study offers a starting framework. They say that sometimes teachers:

- instruct and tell, transmitting information that students have to acquire, memorise and be able to reproduce under test conditions as a measure of their learning
- show and demonstrate (as mentors and coaches rather than instructors)
- discover what students already know (much of which may be misunderstanding) and then find ways to help them find richer insights into problems and how they might be solved (DEMOS, 2007, p.5).

One of the difficulties with this type of list is that it tells us nothing of the desirable balance between the different activities or their appropriateness for particular kinds of learning. Neither does it convey much of the dynamic inside classrooms where 'competing goals and multiple tasks are negotiated at breakneck pace, trade-offs are continually made, unanticipated obstacles and opportunities arise' (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p.69). It gives little indication of what was explored in the previous section of this thesis about learners, not least their motivation. It also omits any reference to the quality of the relationship

between teacher and student. The DEMOS document does go on to focus on the idea of 'personalised learning' and the key task of schools in helping students 'learning to learn'.

Teaching and learning, as Hargreaves observes, are social practices that are irretrievably emotional in nature: 'all teaching is …inextricably emotional – by design or default' (Hargreaves, 2001, p.1057). He sees a renewed emphasis on the role of emotions in teaching as 'a counter discourse to more technical and cognitive driven conceptions of teaching that dominate the language of educational policy and administration' (*ibid*. p.1057). He observes that:

> Good teaching is charged with positive emotion. It is not just a matter of knowing one's subject, being efficient, having the correct competences, or learning all the right techniques. Good teachers are not just well-oiled machines. They are emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy (Hargreaves, 1998, p 835).

Commenting on the thrust of organisational reform, including theories of the learning organisation, Hargreaves also points out how they seem to underplay the emotional dimensions.

Teaching as emotional work

According to Hargreaves, teaching is an emotional practice that cannot be reduced to technical competence or clinical standard. In a study of primary teachers he found that:

> Teachers' emotional commitments and connections to students energised and articulated everything these teachers did: including how they taught, how they planned, and the structures in which they preferred to teach. (Hargreaves, 1998, p.835).

Hargreaves is of the view that reforms and innovations in schools have tended to concentrate on 'the cerebral', ignoring the emotional dimension, 'as if teachers… think and act but never really feel.' He calls for the lifting of emotions out of the private knowledge and appreciation that teachers already have of them, and

honouring 'the centrality of the emotions to the processes and outcomes of teaching, learning and caring in our schools' (*ibid.* p.837).

Hargreaves also reminds us that psychic/emotional rewards are highly valued by teachers in their work. The teachers in his study were proud of how their relationships with students created the emotional climate for learning to take place (*ibid.* p.843).

Teachers' use of humour is noted by Hargreaves as 'what makes them human' (*ibid.* p.848). This resonates with conclusions from an Irish study about how students view teachers:

> Students' definitions of the successful, admired teacher are reasonably standard across age groups and across schools. They emphasised both the instrumental and affective role of the teacher. It was important that the person have a sense of humour, and be able to maintain control without being aggressive or humiliating pupils. An attitude of respect for the pupils as individuals was also deemed essential, and it was expected that the person would be in command of their subject and an affective communicator. Young people were interested in learning and at the same time developing a warm, humorous and mutually respectful relationship with the teacher (Lynch and Lodge, 1999, p.229).

Hargreaves also makes the point that teachers have emotional needs that are satisfied by teaching. His informants mention, *inter alia*, excitement, enjoyment, and sense of creativity, breakthrough and achievement. Hargreaves later contrasted secondary teachers' experience and found greater professional distance and many teachers regarding emotions as intrusions into the classroom (Hargreaves, 2000, p.811). Contrasting his findings with those in the classic study *Schoolteacher* (Lortie, 1975) he observes:

> … secondary school classrooms still come across ….as places lacking emotional intensity – at least from the teachers' point of view. In line with Lortie's study, secondary teachers were more likely to describe their positive relationships in terms of acknowledgment and respect than loving and liking. (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 816)

Noddings (2005) also centrally concerned with emotions in education, talks of the need for schools to be responsive. Her focus is on caring, but 'a relational view of caring' rather than one that sees 'caring as a virtue belonging to carers'

(*ibid*. p. xv). Her central thesis is that 'relational caring is to respond to each individual in such a way as we maintain caring relations.' For Noddings, 'The living other is more important than any theory' (*ibid*. p.xvi).

Teachers' professional development

If the learning as outlined throughout this chapter is to be facilitated, then skilled teachers are essential. (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Coolahan, 2003). Barth aligns student learning and teacher development, which he asserts that

> Probably nothing in a school has more impact on students in terms of skills development, self-confidence or classroom behaviour, than the personal and professional growth of their teachers (Barth, 1990, p.49).

The rudimentary and unstructured nature of professional development in the teaching profession in Ireland is underlined in various policy papers of the 1990s. The OECD Review spoke of the need for 'construction of a nationwide induction and in-service system, using the concept of the teaching career as a foundation (OECD, 1991, p.98) There was strong reinforcement of this viewpoint at the National Education Convention:

> In the context of wide scale curricular reforms, very changed participation patterns and new roles for schools, it was agreed that a *sine qua non* was provision for the in-career development of teachers, following from good initial education and teacher induction experiences. (Coolahan, 1994, p.135)

A year later, the White Paper viewed teachers' development as an on-going process, framing the fundamental aims of in-career development programmes as

> … to equip teachers with the capacity to respond effectively to major changes in the education system, including changes in curriculum, teaching methodologies, assessment, school organisation and management and to provide for teachers' personal and professional development needs. (Government of Ireland, 1995, p.127)

These aspirations culminated in some explicit expression in legislation, for example in Sections 23(2) c of the Education Act,

> The principal shall be responsible for the creation……of a school environment which is supportive of learning among the students and

which promotes the professional development of the teachers. (Government of Ireland, 1998)

Further legislation gave a specific brief to the Teaching Council in Section 39 (1) to 'promote the continuing education and training and professional development of teachers'. (Government of Ireland, 2000b),

In proposing a model for teachers' professional development, Solomon and Tresman (1999, p.317 *sqq*) highlight how the varied social and professional worlds to which each teacher belongs stimulates different value or moral positions, different beliefs and different actions in different contexts. They write about the dynamic 'practical theory' that is the basis of teachers' actions that refers to a person's private, integrated but ever-changing system of knowledge, experience and beliefs. This combination of thought and action leads to one's sense of identity as a teacher as one engages in all kinds of social practices in what Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to as a 'community of practitioners'. In the early years of being a teacher one develops a self-image as a professional. Stories of classroom incidents, and reflection on them, modifies this into a kind of continuously changing autobiography, a narrative that organizes memories and values into a collage that makes sense of one's actions, if only retrospectively.

Based on this, Solomon and Tresman contend that teachers' professional development has to involve reflection on their own values, beliefs and knowledge. In this they echo much of the work done by Schön (1993) in his conceptualizing of the 'reflective practitioner'.

Huberman's (1993) study of the trajectory of teachers' professional lives identified distinct stages, while also acknowledging that the individual's experience may be a significant variation on this model.

Goodson and Hargreaves work on teachers' autobiographies brings to the fore the interplay between the private and the public. Hence, the personal and professional lives of teachers is a key factor in their sense of identity and job satisfaction and, by inference, in their capacity to maintain their effectiveness as

teachers. Summing up an extensive survey of the literature of teacher effectiveness, one conclusion is that:

> Research into teachers' effectiveness needs to relate to their cognitive and affective processes and that these are likely to be influenced by a range of factors, including personal and professional biography, school specific conditions (leadership, cultures), broad cultural and policy contexts, and psychological factors, classroom organisation and teaching approaches used and the characteristics and the backgrounds of the pupils whom they teach. (Day *et al.,* 2007, p.36)

Based on a study of teachers in Switzerland, Huberman (1993), building on the career development ideas of Donald Super, attempted to identify particular phases in the cycle of a teaching career. His model involves flexible movement between the various stages. Huberman 's model beings with an entry/survival discovery stage. This is followed by a stage of stabilization, with experimentation or re-assesment following. These in turn are usually succeeded by stages of serenity, conservatism and, ultimately, disengagement. The latter, be observes, can be serene or bitter. Building on Huberman's work Day *et al.* suggest six professional life phases each with distinct characteristics and trajectories. The stages are set out below.

TABLE 2.7 TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL LIFE PHASES, AFTER DAY *ET AL.* (2007, P.69 SQQ)

Based on their perceived identity, motivation, commitment and effectiveness

Professional life phase 0-3 - commitment: support and challenge Two sub-groups developing sense of efficacy; reduced sense of efficacy	**Professional life phase 4-7 -** identity and efficacy in the classroom Three sub-groups sustaining a strong sense of efficacy; self-efficacy and effectiveness sustaining identity, efficacy and effectiveness identity, efficacy and effectiveness at risk.	**Professional life phase 8-15 -** managing changes in role and identity Two sub-groups sustained engagement; detachment / loss of motivation
Professional life phase 16-23 – work-life tensions; challenges to motivation and commitment Three sub-groups further career advancement	**Professional life phase 24-30** – challenges in sustaining motivation Two sub-groups: (a) sustained a strong sense of motivation and	**Professional life phase 31+-sustaining**/declining motivation, ability to cope with change, looking to retirement. Two sub-groups:

and good pupil results have led to increased motivation/commitment sustained motivation, commitment, and effectiveness	commitment; (b) holding on but losing motivation.	maintaining commitment tired and trapped

Given what has been said earlier about learning, present arrangements in JC and LC highlight teacher as a fount of knowledge. This new model sees the teacher in more a co-learning situation. A mindset change is needed[18].

Moral purpose

Fullan highlights how, in a major study of teacher education, Goodlad and his colleagues found themselves being pushed deeper to the moral purposes of education if they were to articulate a rationale for teaching in post modern society Goodlad (1990, p.46 cited in Fullan, 1993, p.8). Four moral purposes are identified:

- Facilitating critical enculturation: schools have particular responsibility for enculturating young people into a political democracy and are charged to play a key role in facilitating people develop understandings of truth, beauty and justice against which to judge their own and society's virtues and vices.

- Providing access to knowledge: Schools offer the young a disciplined encounter with the subject matter of the human conversation: the world as a physical and biological system; belief systems; the social, political and economic systems. Teachers need to be diligent in ensuring the quality of such encounters.

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[18] A most dramatic example of the kind of mindset change took place for this researcher when, between 1986 and 1995, he taught Media Studies modules to TY students. Each year he was surprised and encouraged by the versatility with which students (often with very modest achievements in the JC examination) could discuss film, radio and TY in particular. Their insights frequently illustrated the power of co-learning. Later, when working on the TY Support Service and conducting workshops on teaching Media Studies, I was regularly confronted with the view that a teacher could/should not engage in serious discussion in a class about, say, a film s/he had not viewed beforehand. For the sceptical, the idea of ceding that amount of control was very challenging. For me, these TY classes demonstrated not only the importance of 'relevance, imagination and challenge' but of how positively young people can respond to the obvious shift in power relations when the teacher's expertise is general and the young person's interest is specific. Sometimes teachers saw the point.

- Building an effective teacher-student connection: Teaching must go beyond the mechanics of teaching and combine generalisable principles of teaching, subject-specific instruction and sensitivity to the pervasive human qualities and potentials always involved.
- Practising good stewardship: teachers must be part of the process of renewing schools.

Centrally driven continuing professional development for teachers in recent years in Ireland has consisted primarily of local clusters of teachers gathering in Education Centres to focus on the introduction of 'new' programmes or syllabus changes. This has its value but perhaps neglects the more challenging complementary learning that needs to take place at school level. Lieberman and Millar (1999) contend that

> Professional learning is most powerful, long lasting and sustainable when it occurs as a result of one's being a member of a group of colleagues who struggle together to plan for a given group of students, replacing the traditional isolation of teachers one from another (*ibid,* p.62).

There is limited evidence of such practices in Irish schools. One account of a small scale, school based CPD project that involved pairs of teachers observing each other's classrooms and afterwards discussing their observations in a group context, concluded that

> The process affirmed teachers as reflective practitioners, boosted teachers' morale by highlighting what they were doing well and developed their confidence to challenge and interrogate their own practices (Jeffers, 2006, p.204).

This type of project challenges the dominant view of CPD and in-service education that appears to be based 'on deficit models, are provider driven, prefer 'off-site' learning and, in practice, avoid genuine in-school teacher collaboration (*ibid.* p.204).

Hargreaves lists three particular dangers to be avoided when constructing CPD. Firstly, he warns against self-indulgence, that is, CPD that avoids the real challenges. Secondly, there can be the 'politically naïve', for example, reflecting on teachers biographies in ways that ignore the historical or situational context.

Thirdly, Hargreaves uses the term 'narcisistically grandiose' to refer to the danger of promoting unrealistic moral obligations that lead to guilt.

Teacher agency

The centrality of teachers to the change process is a recurring theme throughout the literature (e.g. Hargreaves, 1996; Fullan, 1993, 2001). In the culture of schools, beliefs and peer relations are important and teachers are 'more influenced by what they believe and what peers believe' than by management (Sergiovanni, 1996, p.160). Writers such as Schien and Starratt, for example, link the leadership role with teachers' beliefs. Starratt for instance says:

> An empowered staff comes to believe that it has within its ranks enough talent and insight to respond to most school problems and create an outstanding school (Starratt, 1993, p 44).

Empowerment in teaching can be elusive and paradoxical. Lyons *et al.,*(2003, p.382) point out that teachers often experience their own role as both powerful and powerless. This in turn influences their capacity and motivation to be innovative or experimental. Rozenholtz (1989) in her US study remarks that teacher uncertainty and threat to self-esteem are recurring themes in teaching. Rudduck and Flutter recalls Stenhouse's incisive observation that 'only teachers could really change the world of the classroom, and that they would do so by first understanding it' (Rudduck and Flutter, 2004, p.141).

A greater sense of agency, then, is likely to arise when teachers are productively engaged in learning continually. Sarason (1990) argues that it is unrealistic to believe that conditions for productive student learning can be created in isolation from creating similar conditions for teachers.

According to the Teaching Council (2007)

> Continuous professional development is both a right and a responsibility and should be supported by policy and resources at local, regional and national level.

The powerful/powerless paradox is well illustrated by reflecting on how young teachers often experience the schools as workplaces. A report from a conference on *The School as a Model of Good Citizenship* indicates how hierarchical and

non-participative teachers from England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in the first five years of their professional lives encounter schooling (Jeffers, 2004a). What was particularly striking was the sense of powerlessness - across jurisdictions and school types – that was perceived by people who appeared to be very confident and competent people. A major challenge for CPD is to increase the sense of agency among teacher.

Summary

TY provides teachers with particular opportunities to create contexts for eliciting and sustaining the conversations that are at the heart of good teaching. However, innovations like TY challenge teachers' established practices. Successful implementation depends greatly on teachers being convinced of the value of a proposed change – 'they must see things differently' (House, 1974, p.77). In addition, when they adopt an innovation they are likely to adapt it.
Teaching is a complex activity where 'competing goals and multiple tasks are negotiated at breakneck speed' (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p.69). Within teaching, emotions play a key role and 'good teaching is charged with positive emotions' (Hargreaves, 2001, p.1057). This emphasis on emotions brings into focus the relational and caring dimensions of teaching.

Commitment and competence throughout the various phases of a teaching career are likely to be sustained by appropriate on-going education. Becoming a reflective practitioner is seen as particularly beneficial. The importance of a sense of moral purpose and of agency is also emphasised.

Conclusion

Sandwiched between the three-year Junior Cycle and the two-year Senior Cycle where the vast majority of students pursue the established LC, TY finds itself in an ambiguous position. It cannot be viewed in isolation either from what precedes or follows it. With a view to shedding further light on the context in which TY finds itself, this chapter has examined how the literature treats schools as distinct organisations. This author shares Sergiovanni's (1994, 1996, 2005)

assertion that 'a learning community' is a particularly apt description of a school. Furthermore, there has been an unapologetic emphasis throughout the chapter on the need to appreciate the complexity of school communities.

TY is a particularly ambitious innovation. The literature on resistance to innovation serves to underline the extent of the challenges facing schools attempting to implement TY, especially if one takes seriously the aspiration that 'The aims and philosophy of Transition Year should permeate the entire school' (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c, p.4).

This researcher is of the opinion that an innovation's chances of being implemented in schools are directly related to teachers' beliefs about the need for such changes. Hence, the focus in the literature review on young people's needs, the importance of listening to their voices and of understanding their motivations for learning, is an important one. Building on this perspective, some key ideas from Carl Rogers, John Dewy, Paulo Friere, David Kolb and Howard Gardner have been presented. The intention is to both strengthen the theoretical underpinning of TY and also to acknowledge some particular influences on this author's thinking.

The literature highlights how critically important leadership can be in the practical implementation of curricular innovations in schools. This position creates some expectations as to what might be found in the school profiles in Chapter 4 and even among the policy makers and shapers in Chapter 6.

Finally, the chapter examines some of the literature that positions teachers in the context of innovations. In attempting to understand both the embrace and the rejection of innovation, the intention is also to provide a backdrop against which data emerging from teachers in the case study schools might be perceived.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Following on from Transition Year's (TY) historical development (Chapter 1) and the array of issues related to TY in the context of schooling (Chapter 2), the researcher decided that investigating the attitudes of various stakeholders to TY could make an original contribution to educational scholarship.

The research was conducted in two distinct stages. The first stage involved investigating the attitudes of students, teachers, parents, TY co-ordinators and principals in six schools as part of a case study, the case being the TY programme itself. Building on issues arising from the first stage, the second stage sought the perspectives and opinions of senior personnel in nine key agencies involved in the shaping and making of educational policy.

Initially, this chapter explains the background context, rationale and focus of the first stage of the research. Next, the questions prompted by the findings are outlined. The main features of the second phase of the inquiry are then set out. Finally, the chapter recounts some of the obstacles encountered during the research.

Context to the first stage

In 2001, the Department of Education and Science commissioned the researcher to research attitudes to TY. The brief was to look at attitudes to the programme in six schools where TY was 'well regarded'. The funder of the research was quite specific on

the 'well-regarded' point and responded negatively to a question from the researcher about the possibility of looking at schools where TY is not offered. After much consideration, the researcher decided that a case study approach would be a particularly constructive way of approaching the research. Sometimes described as 'the study of an instance in action' (Cohen *et al.* 2000, p.161), a TY case study seemed well suited to the initial intention to research attitudes to TY in schools where the programme 'is well-regarded'. Yin states that the case study method is best applied when research addresses descriptive or explanatory questions and aims to produce a first-hand understanding of people and events (Yin, 2004, p.3). So, the case study would examine how the different actors perceive TY in different schools, aiming to catch 'its particularity and complexity and coming to understand its activity within important circumstances' (Stake, 1995, p xi). Thus, the 'case' is TY, particularly attitudes to it, and the sites are six different schools.

The case study approach is well suited to an investigation of attitudes. It:

> … provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles. Indeed, a case study can enable readers to understand how ideas and abstract principles can fit together. Case studies can penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis. Case studies can establish cause and effect. Indeed one of their strengths is that they observe effects in real contexts, recognising that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects. (Cohen *et al.,*2000, p.181)

It's the researcher's opinion that his previous involvement with TY was probably a major factor in being given the research contract. Thus, the researcher's background is a significant consideration in understanding the development of this study.

In a case study, the researcher is central to the collection of the data and its analysis (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982, p.87; Stake, 1995, p.91 sqq., Simons, 1996, p.225). Particular attention must be paid to bias (Cohen *et al.,*2000, p.120). Inevitably, this author's perspectives are coloured by his own experiences, insights and viewpoints. These derive partly from his work as a deputy-principal in a large community college that introduced TY for all students from 1986; as a teacher of various TY modules between then and 1995; as a member of the 1993-94 TY action team and a member of

the support services from 1995-2000; and, more recently, teaching in a university teacher education department. Because of the experience, the author is 'an insider', rather than an outside, 'objective' assessor of TY, and brings the strengths and weaknesses of that position to the task.

As the research gathered a life of its own, a close familiarity with TY enabled one to see the logic of the inquiry and detect dissonances. There were times, particularly when listening to principals and co-ordinators, when one sensed that what Bogdan and Biklen call 'observer effect' may have been at play. Participants may have inclined towards describing an 'ideal' TY rather than the actual reality.

In attempting to make sense of attitudes to TY, as with any social enquiry, the researcher's own ontological and epistemological assumptions play a major role in shaping the methodologies chosen. Education, educational research, politics and decision-making are 'inextricably intertwined' (Cohen *et al.* .2000, p.3). Similarly, the researcher's experience – particularly in relation to TY, as mentioned above, - his reasoning, and his research data all contributed to driving the logic of the enquiry.

The researcher's initial university degree was in the natural sciences – botany, chemistry, geology and zoology. In that world rigorous empirical evidence from the natural world is highly prized as the validation of theories and hypotheses. Working in schools as a teacher, guidance counsellor and school leader increasingly led the researcher to read in the social sciences, seeking insights into human behaviour. A formal course of study between 1989 and 1991 in Communications and Cultural Studies convinced this researcher that the social sciences are not essentially the same as the natural sciences. While there is overlap and similarity, attempting to uncover natural and universal laws regulating and determining individual and social behaviour should not be the primary thrust of the social sciences. This researcher believes that social enquiry – and therefore educational research - should seek to describe and explain human behaviour, while remaining conscious that each human being is a unique individual who makes choices. The emphasis is, therefore, on how people differ from inanimate natural phenomena, and from each other. This interpretative view means that the researcher sees the world as construed by different people in different ways. Schools, for example, are seen as invented or constructed social realities.

Based on these ontological assumptions, the researcher's epistemological leanings are anti-positivist. This emphasises the personal, subjective and unique dimensions of knowledge, especially if positivism is 'understood as a philosophical position defining the object of the social sciences in such a way as to legislate away their most important problems' (Berger and Luckman, 1985, p 210). Furthermore, while human beings as living creatures in the natural world are subject to the laws of nature, they are also seen as subjects with a real capacity to fashion their environment. This rejection of a deterministic, mechanistic view of peoples' relationships with their environments also has implications for research methodology (Cohen *et al.,* 2000, p.7).

Following from these assumptions, the logical approach to social science enquiry is towards naturalistic, qualitative and interpretative methodologies. If social life is 'dialogic', as Charles Taylor (1994) puts it, then the methodology of social research must be so as well. It must seek out the 'voices' embedded in the social context in order to gain a true understanding of what people are saying and why they do what they do (Howe and Moses, 1999, p.32).

Rationale

At the outset of the first stage of the research, the researcher expected that students, their teachers and their parents might manifest different attitudes towards TY. While there might be agreement among stakeholders regarding some aspects of the programme, considerable anecdotal evidence pointed to TY remaining a contested, controversial topic. The researcher's experience, particularly when working on the support services, suggested that school contexts; conceptualisations of young people and their learning needs; the quality of leadership, especially by principals and by TY co-ordinators; and teachers' views of their roles would be particularly important areas to explore.

From the outset, the perspectives on schools as organisations with distinct characteristics and cultures, as described in Chapter 2, were central to the researcher's interests. How does TY impact on such organisations, and how do they impact on TY?

How do school cultures enable or inhibit the development of TY? How do the viewpoints of Handy and Aitken (1986), Sergiovanni (1994) and Ball (1997), for example, play out in the TY context? Thus, establishing some of the practical, organisational details regarding the daily implementation of TY in a school was seen as important and the analysis of programmes and timetables was viewed as a valuable data source.

As set out in Chapter 2, Gleeson's questioning of an imprecision in Irish educational discourse in the use of terms such as curriculum *reform*, curriculum *innovation*, curriculum *development* and curriculum *change* 'as if they were interchangeable' (Gleeson, 2004, p.105) is relevant and challenging. Where does TY fit in this framework? Arguably, it can be seen as operating at all four levels since it is a complex, multi-faceted feature of the school system, sandwiched between the Junior Cycle and the established Leaving Cert. (eLC) cycle. TY is also a distinctly Irish example of a 'bottom up' development. While the DES provides a broad framework for the programme, school participation is voluntary and individual schools have extensive opportunities for school-based curriculum development. Thus, for the purposes of this study, TY is described usually as 'an innovation'. However, bearing in mind Gleeson's concerns, the extent to which TY brings about the 'deep change' at the levels of materials, practice, and practitioners' beliefs and values (Fullan, 1993, p, 32-36) associated with genuine curriculum change was an important focus throughout.

In addition to a concern with school contexts, schools as organisations and TY as an innovation, a fourth broad perspective at the outset concerned young people and their worlds. A consequence of the assertion in Chapter 2 on the centrality of children and young people in making schools unique organisations is that their views should be sought. The neglect of students' voices in educational research, as noted by, for example, Rudduck *et al.* (1996), and Lodge and Lynch (1999) is an ongoing concern of this researcher. Dempsey's (2001) study demonstrates how young people's reflections on TY can be particularly sophisticated and insightful.

With 'the use of a wide range of teaching/learning methodologies and situations' being a key feature of TY (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c, p.8), a fifth broad area of interest was concerned with learning activities designed by teachers to bring about

the personal, social, intellectual and vocational development that is at the core of the TY project (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c, p.4) and how informants view these.

Of course, themes interweave and overlap. The researcher was aware that, just as curriculum development, school development and teacher development are symbiotically related (Callan, 2006), similarly attitudes to TY, the implementation of the programme and the relationship between TY and the rest of school life are closely related

Research question

 Based on these perspectives, the central research question was formulated as:

- What are the attitudes of the critical actors – students, teachers, parents and school leaders – towards TY and how do these attitudes manifest themselves in the operation of TY at six distinct school sites?

Case Study

MacDonald and Walker (1975, p.3) cited in Simons (1996, p. 231), contend that case studies in education 'have characteristics which call for a fusion of the artist and the scientist'. A case study approach to TY is well suited to looking at the overall picture rather than at individual fragments or components. Not only are data both described and analysed but also particular instances and issues can be identified and probed so as to catch some of the close-up reality of TY. A case study also appeared to have the potential to capture different perspectives on the same reality, particularly across the six sites. Within a case study, a 'funnel approach' (see Bogdan and Biklen,1982, p.59) enables the exploration of a broad sweep of issues and then a narrower focus on some critical issues. This seemed particularly appropriate, given the range and extent of issues associated with TY.

A case study approach involves an eclectic use of data-gathering, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. This researcher was conscious at the outset that

schools had devised their own programmes and timetables, so documentary evidence would be important. A questionnaire could elicit comparable responses to fixed questions. Interviews could then probe the more subtle dimensions of beliefs and attitudes to TY. This approach would generate data quickly and support a distinctive feature of the case study approach, which is that the researcher starts data analysis in tandem with data gathering (Yin, 2004, p.4).

The case study approach also involves some drawbacks. As will be seen in this study, a massive amount of information can be generated. Organizing it coherently is both challenging and time-consuming. In view of the accusation from Cohen *et al.* (2000, p.184) that case study reporting can be 'selective, biased, personal and subjective' the researcher attempted to avoid such pitfalls.

Thus, reliability and validity are major concerns in case study research. Given the various sources of data, when an interpretation or assertion was made, corroborating evidence was sought.

Triangulation derives its name from the kind of physical measurement used in celestial navigation, where location can be inferred partly by measuring the elevation of the stars (Stake, 1995, p.109).

> Triangular techniques in the social sciences attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint and, in so doing, by making use of both quantitative and qualitative data. Triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity, particularly in qualitative research. (Cohen *et al.*, 2000, p.112)

The questionnaire (Appendix 1) provides teachers' perspectives and attitudes from six different sites. As Wellington (2000, p.101) remarks, in a case study, the use of questionnaires can be effective in giving 'a wider picture.' Data from the questionnaires provide an extensive frame of reference throughout the study. Comments from the focus groups with students and parents were coded and analysed, while all the time checking for repetition and re-inforcement. Comments by principals and co-ordinators were also checked against formal publications issued by the schools. To test further the reliability and validity of the school profiles, drafts of the

school profiles were circulated to the six schools[8] in the summer of 2006. While all observed that some details of their schools had changed in the intervening time, they confirmed that they regarded the profiles as substantially accurate.

In analysing the data, the thrust was towards uncovering attitudes of students, teachers, parents and school leaders towards TY and how such attitudes are reflected in the day-to-day operation of TY in each school. Much of the way this works is through what Geertz (1973, quoted in Cohen *et al.* 2000, p.182) calls *thick descriptions*, relying heavily on how the actors themselves see TY, what they regard as 'normal' and what they see as problematic. In addition to the data and analysis, additional material is included in Appendix 1, as both further evidence and as an invitation towards further interpretations.

Typical, representative data is important in case study research. However, a single incident, event or observation can also illuminate a particular issue. Throughout this study, there is a tension between some points that tend towards generalization and others that may be unique to a particular school situation. The value and relevance here is that multiple realities – the attitudes of students, of teachers, of parents and of school leaders and programme co-ordinators – can be presented and interrogated.

There is a particular relevance for policy makers in providing complex data and multiple perspectives in a case study, according to Simons. It enables them to increase their understanding of the programme and so make policy making 'uncertain' – rendering the unfamiliar familiar and the familiar strange. Reviewing the development of case study, she says:

> Compared with traditional evaluation models which promised conclusive evidence, and thus to terminate enquiry, cases study offered opportunities for policy makers to learn from the evidence, to expand the scope of the enquiry, to reconstruct their own understanding in order to inform their judgments on policy directions (Simons, 1996, p.229).

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[8] By the summer of 2006, four of the principals were no longer in those positions so the feedback was from two principals and four TY co-ordinators.

The piloting stage

Given that the brief was to research attitudes to TY in schools where the programme was 'well regarded', the researcher sought the guidance of the Transition Year Curriculum Support Service (TYCSS). Following a meeting in May 2001, team members generated a list of schools where they felt the TY programmes were characterised by some distinctive good practice. Two schools from that list - an all-boys school in an urban setting and a co-educational community school in a medium-sized town - were selected for piloting. Focus group interviews took place with groups of Third year, TY, Fifth year and Sixth year students. The principals and co-ordinators were interviewed and an extensive questionnaire was given, in one case by the principal and in the other by the TY co-ordinator, to each staff member.

Particular issues arose during the piloting. Firstly, a number of teachers made explicit reference to the industrial relations climate in schools at the time.[9] Some indicated that, as the study was for the DES, they would not take part. Others added that their colleagues' non-engagement with the process could also be explained by the ongoing dispute. This delayed and limited the data-gathering.

Secondly, there were mixed views about the length of the questionnaire. Some stated that it was too long, while others indicated an appreciation of its extent. In the light of the feedback generated, the questionnaire was modified and shortened. The adjusted questionnaire was further refined in a third school where those who completed it were specifically asked to nominate questions for elimination. In that school, the dominant view was that a complex questionnaire was respectful of the multi-faceted nature of TY.

Similarly, in the pilot schools, interviews with focus groups, of four students each, assisted in adjusting a set of questions for semi-structured interviews. Typically, these interviews were arranged by the TY co-ordinator and took place during a single class

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[9] During 2001 and 2002 the ASTI (Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland) were in dispute with the DES regarding issues of supervision and class substitution. Schools were closed on a number of occasions. Some parents, and, in some cases, students, as well as some members of the wider public reacted negatively towards the teachers' cause. Media reports then and since have tended to use the term 'acrimonious' to describe relationships at that time.

period. Allowing for introductions and explanations, the structure facilitated interviews that lasted, in practice, approximately 30 minutes.

The original intention was to gather data in the pilot schools, firstly by interviewing the school principal, then by engaging in some student interviews, by meeting the staff collectively in order to distribute the questionnaire, by engaging in more student interviews and, finally, by interviewing the co-ordinator. The experience in both schools led to the conclusion that:

a) The sequence, even if planned, was likely to be interrupted by the pressure of other demands within the school day.
b) It would be difficult to conduct all the data-gathering in an individual school within one day.

Selecting the six schools

Studying TY at six different sites is an example of what Stake (1995, p.4) calls a 'collective case study'. The researcher expected that, by examining TY at these six sites, some distinctive features of TY itself would be revealed and that the uniqueness of particular TY programmes in different contexts would enhance the understanding of TY itself.

Numerous considerations informed the selection of the six schools from the list of 30 provided by the members of the TYCSS. These schools were regarded as having some distinctive good practice in their TY programmes. As Hannan and Boyle (1987) point out, there has been a wide diversity of institutional provision in second-level schooling in Ireland. With an eye on the more obvious distinguishing differences between schools such as: geographical location; school type (voluntary secondary, vocational or community); students' gender (all boys, all girls or co-educational); school size; and the socio-economic profile of the school, the researcher also attempted to ensure that the selected schools demonstrated a mix of factors. These included: the length of time the school had offered TY; whether TY was compulsory or optional; whether the school also offers Leaving Cert. Applied (LCA); the school's previous history with curriculum

development; the duration of the principal in post; the duration of the TY co-ordinator in post; teachers' participation in TY-specific in-career education; and the school's previous engagement with the TY support service.

Two other particular considerations were important. Firstly, fee-paying schools were not included. TY is already well established in that sector, with many such schools making TY compulsory. The experience of the support services in citing good practice from fee-paying schools had been mixed. There was an understandable tendency for teachers in non-fee-paying schools to dismiss the validity of perceived good practice on the basis of the availability of significant additional resources. Secondly, conscious that schools designated disadvantaged tend to be under-represented among schools offering TY (Jeffers, 2002), it was decided that two such schools should be included. Ultimately, the combination of six schools selected represented a contrasting mix and there was at least one recommended by each member of the five-person TYCSS team.

A fictitious name[10] was attributed to each school in an attempt to mask identities. The following table gives a brief outline of the six selected schools.

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[10] From the outset, it was made clear that volunteering schools would not by identified by name. Native Irish tree types were selected to protect the schools' identities. Assurances of anonymity were also given to participating co-ordinators, students, teachers and parents (see Jeffers, 2007a, p. 342).

TABLE 3.1 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SIX SITES[11] WHERE DATA WERE GATHERED FOR THE INITIAL CASE STUDY

ASH SCHOOL is an all-girls voluntary secondary school in an urban setting with a strong history of innovation. Prior to the introduction of the Junior Certificate, Ash School had operated a six-year cycle.TY has always been compulsory there.	BEECH SCHOOL is a co-educational community college, designated as 'disadvantaged'. It also has a strong tradition of introducing innovative programmes, including JCSP, LCA and TY.
CHESTNUT SCHOOL is an all-boys voluntary secondary school in a suburban location. It has a strong tradition of academic achievement. TY in Chestnut School is co-ordinated by a two-person team.	MAPLE SCHOOL is a small co-educational VEC school located in a western town. It was established in the early 1990s. It introduced TY in 1996.
OAK SCHOOL is an urban all-girls school, designated 'disadvantaged'. One of the members of the schools' first TY co-ordinating team has become principal in Oak School.	SYCAMORE SCHOOL is a community school in a rural location, established in the early 1990s and offering TY since 1996.

Expanding the research question

As the researcher engaged with the six schools and data began to emerge, a progressive focusing on more detailed aspects of the research question developed. Some of these were etic issues, that is, ones that the researcher was aware of at the outset (Stake, 1995, p.20). Others were emic issues, arising from the perspectives and concerns of actors that had not appeared particularly significant at the start. Furthermore, comparison of the data from the various sources also led to a new focus on particular issues. Among the emic issues were:

- the significance of students contrasting their experiences in TY so strongly with those in the Junior Cycle;
- the need for analysis to probe beyond nomenclature when reviewing documentation, including timetables;

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[11] Categorising schools beyond the crude and unsatisfactory categories of Voluntary Secondary/ VEC/Community and Comprehensive is fraught with difficulty. Hannan and Boyle's (1987) analysis, while dated, retains some currency. As regards 'perceived levels of autonomy' the six schools might be grouped as 'moderate' to 'high' (*ibid.* p.49). Regarding social orientation, Beech, Oak and Maple would be categorised as 'primarily working class', Sycamore as 'all social groups' and Ash and Chestnut as 'explicitly middle class' (*ibid.* p.55).

- teachers' attitudes to in-school factors that enable/inhibit the successful implementation of TY;

- parents' apparent reluctance to make generalisations about TY;

- questions relating to students' motivation, particularly among those who had previously experienced limited academic success.

No doubt, in reporting on a topic as broad as 'attitudes to TY', certain features are highlighted and others downplayed, or even neglected. The researcher attempted to let the data drive the report and has strived for impartiality. Where apparent successes manifest themselves, he has attempted to situate them in context. Similarly, failures, disappointments and problems with TY are identified and attempts made to understand some of the factors at play. All the time, attention has been paid to presenting an account that is faithful to the experiences of all informants.

As the case study developed and the researcher began to identify particular themes, the importance of grounding the account in the operational details became clearer. The validity of House's (1974) perspectives, as discussed in Chapter 2, became clear. Early data also made it obvious that TY's contested status within schools ensured a political focus. Finally, much data pointed towards the centrality of each school's own culture in understanding how TY manifested itself at each of the six sites.

Ethical considerations

Intruding into the life of a school, while problematic, was a logical consequence from the research question. In addition to practical problems in executing the data gathering, important ethical considerations needed to be considered. Informed consent is a key consideration (Howe and Moses, 1999, p.24).

This involves participants weighing up the risks and benefits associated with taking part in the research - something they can only do if they are informed about what is involved. Privacy is a further consideration, and is protected by anonymity and confidentiality. – not revealing identity-specific data. Ethical pitfalls to be avoided in

research include: falsifying data; reporting results incorrectly; and plagiarising[12]. Of course, not only should educational research not aim to do harm. It should be 'for teaching' (Noddings, 1986, p.506), not simply 'on teaching'. For Noddings, educational research should exemplify caring, particularly trust and mutual respect. She asserts that the research question and the overall conduct of the research should be based on their potential to contribute to caring school communities (Noddings, 1986). The researcher has attempted to be faithful to this view.

Following exploratory phone calls, letters were sent to school principals, inviting their schools to take part in the research and setting out, broadly, what would be involved. An emphasis was placed on schools volunteering to take part. Assurances were given that schools' and participants' identities would remain anonymous. All six schools approached agreed to take part, in some cases following consultation with staff and Boards of Management.

In compiling the questionnaire and the schedule of questions for use in the semi-structured interviews and focus groups, respect for the individual's privacy was paramount. As can be seen in Appendices 2 and 3, care was taken to make sure that students, teachers and parents were giving informed consent. Names were not sought on questionnaire responses and students and parents were told explicitly that their actual names would be not used when reporting.

There was no coercion placed on any teacher to complete a questionnaire. The emphasis was continually on volunteering. Similarly, the co-ordinators who sought students and parents for the interview groups impressed on them the voluntary nature of their participation. At the outset of each interview, the researcher underlined participants' rights to withdraw at any stage of the process. On occasion, principals and co-ordinators revealed details of school life that were 'off the record'- sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly. The author has attempted to respect that confidentiality. Copies of the schools' profiles – as mentioned earlier in relation to reliability and validity – were shown to the relevant parties for comment during 2006.

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[12] Misconduct needs to be distinguished from 'honest mistakes, shoddy work and real disagreements about results or interpretations' (Howe and Moses, 1999, p.27).

Data gathering and analysis

Data were gathered intermittently, between 2002 and 2005, from four main sources.

Firstly, documentary evidence from a range of sources was assembled. While much of this was relevant to the story of TY's evolution, as already seen in Chapter 1, it was also crucial in establishing the details of the programme in individual schools as set out in Chapter 4. Brochures, written programmes and timetables were especially sought. Relevant literature, particularly related to innovation and educational change was also consulted. *Transition Year Programme, Guidelines for Schools* (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c) is a critically important reference document throughout the study.

Secondly, an extensive questionnaire (Appendix 1) was used to elicit teachers' attitudes. While generating numerical data, the main value of the questionnaire was in indicating broad attitudes towards TY among participating teachers. A questionnaire offered a relatively anonymous form of data collection. It seemed more likely to encourage frankness about any sensitive issues relating to TY. It also ensured that a broad spread of opinion could be canvassed relatively efficiently. The use of a Likert scale (Cohen *et al.* 2000, p.253) facilitated the comparison and differentiation of teachers' views across the six sites. Some of the difficulties encountered in the pilot stage re-surfaced. Teacher questionnaire response rates were, according to two of the co-ordinators, lower than might be expected. The legacy of the industrial relations climate at the time and the questionnaire's length were cited by way of explanation. In total, 113 questionnaires were returned from the six schools, representing a return of slightly less than 50% of the teachers in those schools[13].

Thirdly, semi-structured individual interviews (see Appendix 2), while time-consuming, elicited considerable information from school principals and co-ordinators. The looser structure allowed the interviewees to recount aspects of TY that they saw as

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[13] As the data in Chapter 4 indicates, there were significantly different return rates from the schools. There were almost full returns from Maple, Beech and Chestnut , slightly less from Oak, with disappointing response rates from Ash and Sycamore.

important. The flexibility also meant that when unexpected dimensions of the topic emerged, they could be pursued (Bogdan and Biklan, 1982, p.135). The piloting proved very useful in refining the interview questions. The interviews were taped and transcribed. Much of the data from these interviews provided foundations on which school profiles could be constructed. In addition to conducting interviews with the six principals, semi-structured interviews were also held with three co-ordinators in Beech School, two co-ordinators in Chestnut School and one each in Ash, Oak, Maple and Sycamore. Furthermore, there was on-going contact, right up to the completion of the study, with principals and co-ordinators through telephone, e-mail, letter and face-to-face meetings.

Fourthly, focus group interviews with students and parents resulted in extensive data. In all, 110 students in 26 groups were interviewed. Interviews ranged from 27 minutes to 38 minutes in length. Selections for the focus groups were made in each school by the co-ordinators. The co-ordinators were asked explicitly to include a 'mix' of students. 'Mix' was described as including such variables as social background, academic achievements, motivation and, in the co-educational schools, gender. The purpose was to widen the range of perspectives on TY. There is no reason to believe that the co-ordinators did other than requested. In some interviews, the mix was very evident; but neither is there any way of indicating how mixed the groups were. The number and size of the student focus groups in each school is presented below. Focus group interviews were also held with four parents in Oak School and with six parents in Maple School. Again, these were selected by the co-ordinators, with similar requests for a 'mix', as with the student groups. Both of these sessions lasted more than an hour each.

TABLE 3.2 FIRST STAGE OF DATA GATHERING – THE 250 INFORMANTS

Ash School	**Beech School**	**Chestnut School**	**Maple School**	**Oak School**	**Sycamore School**	Total
Principal interviewed	Principal interviewed	Principal interviewed	Principal interviewed	Principal interviewed	Principal interviewed	6
Co-ordinator interviewed	4 Co-ordinators interviewed	2 Co-ordinators interviewed	Co-ordinator interviewed	Co-ordinator interviewed	Co-ordinator interviewed	10
3rd Year Focus Group (4 students)	3rd Year Focus Group (4 students)	3rd Year Focus Group (4 students)	3rd Year Focus Group (5 students)	3rd Year Focus Group (6 students)	3rd Year Focus Group (4 students)	27
4th Year (TY) Focus Group (4 students)	4th Year (TY) Focus Group (4 students)	4th Year (TY) Focus Group (4 students)	4th Year (TY) Focus Group (4 students)	4th Year (TY) Focus Group (6 students)	4th Year (TY) Focus Group (4 students)	26
5th Year Focus Group (4 students)	5th Year Focus Group (4 students)	5th Year Focus Group (4 students)	5th Year Focus Group (4 students)	5th Year Focus Group (4 students)	5th Year Focus Group (4 students)	24
6th Year (eLC) Focus Group (4 students)	6th Year (eLC) Focus Group (4 students)	6th Year (eLC) Focus Group (4 students)	6th Year (eLC) Focus Group (4 students)	6th Year (eLC) Focus Group (5 students)	6th Year (eLC) Focus Group (5 students)	26
	6th Year (LCA) Focus Group (4 students)				6th Year (LCA) Focus Group (4 students)	8
			Parents' Focus Group (6)	Parents' Focus Group (4)		10
9 Teacher Questionnaires	32 Teacher Questionnaires	28 Teacher Questionnaires	11 Teacher Questionnaires	18 Teacher Questionnaires	15 Teacher Questionnaires	113
27	57	47	36	45	38	250

The questionnaires were tabulated and analysed and findings were recorded. The taped interviews were transcribed, coded for emerging themes and analysed. Contemporaneous field notes, made immediately after the school visits, provided valuable frameworks for deciding on the broad themes. Some data, particularly relating to history, programmes and timetables, required a number of other visits, letters, e-mails and phone calls.

This rich mix of qualitative and quantitative data both provides evidence and offers clues that point towards particular interpretations (Bogdan and Biklan, 1982, p.73). The varied data also allow for cross checking and triangulation for reliability and validity. Furthermore, gathering the perceptions and attitudes of different stakeholders adds to the transparency of the data. In *Attitudes to Transition Year* (Jeffers, 2007a)

the distinct attitudes of young people, teachers, and parents were presented in three chapters. These were followed by a chapter profiling each school, with the emphasis on the programme's structure and how the principal and co-ordinator regarded TY. The presentation of the original data in that format helped describe TY as a mosaic, with distinct manifestations at each site, reinforcing the value of the case-study approach. However, the researcher was concerned, given the ethical points made earlier, that the very distinctiveness of each site might lead to the identification of particular schools. The relative smallness of the world of Irish post-primary schooling exacerbates this. As already mentioned, drafts of the school profiles were sent to the schools in May 2006. Responses over the following five months consisted of minor adjustments. None related to the school's identity or that of any of the 250 participants.

Additional perspectives

Emerging data from the study was presented at a number of conferences and meetings and feedback from those who attended at these events was particularly valuable. Questions and challenges at these sessions provided some of the investigator triangulation and theory triangulation that Stake (1995, p.113) advocates. These included:

- Educational Studies Association of Ireland Annual Conference, Belfast, 11.04.03
- Teacher Education in the Republic of Ireland, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, 13.11.03
- Invitation Consultation and Dissemination Seminar, Drumcondra Education Centre, 8.12.03
- Educational Studies Association of Ireland Annual Conference, Maynooth, *2.04.04*
- Research Seminar, Department of Education and Science, Marlborough Street., Dublin, 20.09.04
- Educational Studies Association of Ireland Annual Conference, Cavan, 30.04.07.

Presenting the data from the first stage of the research

Completing a report on that first stage of the research (Jeffers, 2007a, 2007b) opened the way to revisit some of the data and to explore some emerging issues. This led to

two key decisions. Firstly, looking at all the data from each of the schools, Ash, Beech, Chestnut and Sycamore,[14] in a more integrated way should provide a clearer picture of distinct features of TY in each school and, critically, significant similarities and differences. Thus, the case of TY in these four schools, integrating the perspectives and attitudes of students, teachers and parents with the material on programme structure and attitudes of principals and co-ordinators, is presented in Chapter 4 of this thesis. The second decision was to include a synopsis of the insights from the research in the schools. Thus, Chapter 5 includes a summary of the main findings from the initial data from the six schools.

Second stage of the research

The most significant emic issue to emerge following the engagement with the case of TY in the six schools concerned more official attitudes to the programme. If ambiguous attitudes are so prevalent in schools, how do those who influence and make policy regard TY? Furthermore, the initial research had concluded that:

> Perhaps one of the long-term legacies of the mainstreaming of TY is that it has generated, and sustains, discussion among students, parents, teachers, school leaders, policy makers and the wider society as to the purposes of schooling. (Jeffers, 2007a, p.320).

So, how might these policy makers view TY in the wider context of Irish post-primary schooling, now and into the future?

Thus, the researcher embarked on the second stage of the data-gathering. While the original research question had been to examine the attitudes of students, teachers, parents and school leaders towards TY and how such attitudes manifest themselves in the operation of TY at different sites, now the task was to enquire into the attitudes towards TY of senior personnel in key agencies involved in the shaping and making of educational policy. Informed by the range of attitudes uncovered in the earlier part of the research, the focus would be on testing how much these informants articulated

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[14] While there were six schools in the original study, four were selected, partly for reasons of time and length but also as more contrasting. Oak School, an all-girls school designated disadvantaged in an urban setting, while displaying many unique features, was similar, particularly in the challenges the school faces in relation to TY, to Beech School. Maple School, a small VEC school, in a western town that offers a most engaging TY programme is, in many ways, exceptional. Accounts of the two schools' programmes can be read in Jeffers, 2007a.

similar views. It also became clearer that the research question was now moving towards attitudes to TY as innovation in the wider context of second-level schooling and, by implication, resistance to that innovation. Thus, the second part of the data-gathering had as the central research question:

- Based on insights from the first part of the research, what are the attitudes of senior personnel in key agencies involved in the shaping and making of educational policy towards Transition Year as in innovation in Irish post-primary schooling?

The semi-structured interview had proved fruitful when eliciting information from students, parents, co-ordinators and principals during the first stage of the research. Reflecting on the data-gathering in stage one, the researcher had come to the conclusion that he has a facility to enable informants to talk frankly about their beliefs and values as well as their practice.

Thus, the key decision was to conduct one-hour, tape-recorded, semi-structured interviews with senior personnel in nine agencies involved in influencing, making and implementing policy at national level. While many of the methodological issues mentioned earlier in relation to interviewing students, parents and school personnel re-surfaced, some additional issues emerged later. There were numerous potential questions arising from the initial stage of the research and the report. Only a few could be explored in an hour-long interview so some focused, specific questions were devised and combined with much broader ones. However, before getting to that stage there was the specific problem that the interviewees were not familiar with the research or even its main points, and could, quite reasonably, complain of being 'ambushed' by data with which they were not familiar.

Posting a copy of the report on the website of the researcher's workplace, the Education Department of NUI Maynooth, made it available to any visitor to the site. Simultaneously, a letter to potential interviewees included 12 key points emerging from the report and mapped likely questions (Appendix 3).

The questions are a deliberate combination of focused, specific enquiries and broader, trawling questions. Asking participants to respond to the finding that young people

tend to speak more enthusiastically about TY than about programmes such as the JC or eLC made it clear at the beginning of the interview that the interviewer was concerned with TY in context. It was also deemed important to ask each informant how they thought their particular agency has responded to TY. Depending on their specific representative area (e.g. parents, teachers, school leaders), they were asked about that group's attitudes to aspects of TY. Bearing in mind proposals for the development of the senior cycle (NCCA, 2005), another set of questions invited interviewees to imagine TY's future and the future of schooling.

While the semi-structured interview process had been effective in the schools, such a level of openness might be more difficult to achieve with policy-makers. The importance of developing trust from the outset was crucial. As already mentioned, the researcher was an 'insider' and was known to the personnel working in those agencies which shape and make policy. This had the advantage that establishing contact with senior personnel would not be difficult. A disadvantage was that the researcher was known as someone who had worked on the TY support services and had written and spoken publicly in favour of schools engaging with TY. A fear was that informants might, therefore, be inclined to mask or modify any reservations or criticisms they had about TY. The challenge would be to explore beyond superficial enthusiasms for the programme. Potential informants responded warmly and encouragingly to an initial telephone call. A more formal letter and the material included in Appendix 3 preparing the way for the interview followed this.

 The nine agencies were: The Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland; The Department of Education and Science (DES); The Leadership Development for Schools programme (LDS); The National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD): The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA); The National Parents Council, post-primary (NPCpp); The Second-Level Support Service (SLSS); The School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI); The Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI). When it came to arranging suitable dates, the ASTI General Secretary was unavailable and nominated the organisation's Education Officer. Following the telephone contact, a set of questions was sent by e-mail to interviewees. The interview schedule was as set out below:

TABLE 3.3 SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEWS WITH POLICY SHAPERS AND MAKERS

Time and date	Organisation	Interviewee
27th June 07, 3 pm	TUI	John MacGabhann, Assistant General Secretary
28th June 07, 11.30 am	NAPD	Mary McGlynn, Director
28th June 07, 4.30 pm	LDS	Eilis Humphreys, Assistant National Co-ordinator
3rd July 07, 11 am	SDPI	Dr Sinéad Breathnach, National Co-Ordinator
6th July 07, 11.30 am	NCCA	Dr Anne Looney, Chief Executive
9th July 07, 11 am	ASTI	Moira Leyden, Education Officer
9th July 07, 4 pm	DES	Eamon Stack, Chief Inspector
10th July 07, 12 noon	NPC	Marion Lyon, NPCpp representative on the NCCA
11th July 07, 11 am	SLSS	Michael Garvey, Director

Each interviewee was welcoming and gave generously of his or her time. Conscious of how busy each policy shaper or policy maker is, the researcher requested a one-hour interview and used a 60 minute audio tape. When the tape ran out it signalled the end of the interview. In ease case, the participant subsequently engaged in informal conversation, some of it expanding on what had been said 'on tape'.

While all interviewees acknowledged receiving the letter with the 12 points emerging from the report (Appendix 3), it was not always clear how familiar they were with them. Secondly, four of the nine informants gave evidence during the interview that they had read the report. Two stated explicitly that they had not and in the other three cases the interviewer formed the opinion that they had little sense of the report's contents. It is the researcher's opinion that the four who had read the report appeared more comfortable during the interview, especially with supplementary questions. However, the other five were, by virtue of their roles, all very familiar with TY and the range of attitudes to the programme. The four 'readers' were, later analysis suggested, among the more enthusiastic about TY. It is the researcher's opinion, partly based on previous contacts with the informants, that this disposition pre-dated their reading of the report. Thus, the inference is that reading the report prior to the interview did not fundamentally alter the views of those being interviewed.

Ethical issues in the second phase

The ethical perspective described earlier in this chapter relating to gathering data from the school was quite clear and relatively straightforward. Many of the issues

mentioned earlier also arose at the second stage. In addition, there were some new ones. As indicated above, there were both advantages and disadvantages associated with being an 'insider'. In particular, the question of 'informed consent' was well tested. For the researcher, some valuable comments were made in the margins of the formal interviews. The question was: Could these be used? Any doubts were quickly dispelled when the researcher returned the transcripts to the participants for their validation. The researcher encountered disappointment, frustration and, eventually, acceptance when some of the most apparently revealing remarks from four of the nine initial interviews became 'out of bounds'.

Following the interviews, the tapes were listened to, on a number of occasions, and the conversations transcribed. These first draft transcripts, as agreed, were sent back to each interviewee to check for accuracy or particular omissions. While each informant eventually 'signed off', it was far from a simple process. One interviewee was happy not to make any changes while four more made very minor alterations. Another annotated the text with phrases such as 'highly sensitive.' The researcher decided that, in such instances, the verbatim text was not to be used. Two others made extensive and substantial alterations so that the second draft omitted some of the key points from the interview. One of these requested sight of any material that would be included in the thesis prior to its submission. Relevant extracts were sent in February 2008. These were returned in March, with some suggested adjustments. The final informant indicated that none of the material could be used without explicit permission on the text and context. Relevant extracts were also sent to this informant in February 2008 and were returned in March 21st with a number of proposed changes.

While this restriction removes some engaging perspectives from the study, the researcher recognises that informants' right to edit the transcripts was part of the original understanding (see Appendix 3). Ethically, that original material should not be used, and is not used in this thesis. However, this prompted the researcher to revisit some of the literature on research, as well as on discourse analysis and the observation from Habermas, cited in Cohen *et al.* (2000, p.298) that 'utterances are never simply sentences' and that discourse can be subject to 'repression and ideological distortion'. The distinction between the locutionary aspects of speech –

what is being said – and the illocutionary and perlocutionary aspects – what is being done or achieved through the utterance – proved useful. Informants' use of metaphor proved to be of particular interest. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Other reservations

Because the researcher was working alone and part-time, the data used in this study has been gathered intermittently since 2002. At a time of rapid social and educational change, TY itself and attitudes to it have also been in flux. One indicator of the shifting situation is that four of the principals in the six original schools have vacated their positions during the period. Another is that no sooner had the report commissioned by the DES been delivered than the DES itself addressed a central point – the need to increase the additional grant for individual TY students – thus making it redundant. Data-gathering then, like writing, is time-bound. Without clairvoyance one does not know which aspects of the case study will be of most relevance in the future.

A further reservation concerns the selection of schools. TY's uniqueness suggests that six different schools might have uncovered different issues, though feedback to *Attitudes to Transition Year* (Jeffers, 2007a) indicates that the thrust of the report resonates with the experience in many schools. A greater weakness in the study is the absence of schools that decided not to offer TY, or schools that offered it at one time and then, for whatever reasons, abandoned offering it. Attitudes in such schools might have illuminated resistance to the programme more vividly. This reflects the initial context of the research: a response to a funder's agenda to look at schools where TY is 'well-regarded'.

The experience of interviewing policy makers and shapers was instructive. Those in positions of power –gatekeepers - are used to having significant control over their published utterances. This presents particular challenges for the researcher. Being an 'insider' and known to the participants can exacerbate the situation. When critical, contested or controversial viewpoints are identified, the inclination of the powerful can be to suppress. The instincts of the researcher, on the other hand, is to be as

comprehensive as possible, especially regarding sensitive topics. It is clear that 'informed consent' in such circumstances is not always a once-off event but part of a process that has to be negotiated.

A third, emerging issue

This chapter has described how the two related research questions developed. As the researcher allowed the emerging data drive the process, the logic of the enquiry pointed to another underlying question. This is an example of an emic issue (Stake, 1996, p.20), one that had not seemed of great significance at the outset. Towards the end of the process, the researcher realised that this third question had bubbled below the surface throughout the research. It relates to how an innovation can act as a lens through which the school system can be seen anew. The question can be formulated as:

- What does the experience of TY in the schooling system illustrate about how the system –policy makers and shapers, agency officials, school leaders, teachers, parents and students – embraces and resists curricular innovations?

How schools *domesticate* TY which is a strong component of the emerging data led to extensive grappling with practices such as selective engagement with the innovation and covert resistance. The literature relating to schools as 'robust' organisations in the early part of Chapter 2 is particularly relevant to this question.

This third research question is a particularly useful perspective through which the next chapter can be read. Each school's own story of its preparation for the introduction of TY, the programme's actual manifestation and the difficulties encountered illuminates the process of innovation and resistance. It also becomes a valuable lens through which Chapter 6 might be read. Finally, the question is explored in some detail in Chapter 7.

In terms issues, having established a broad contextual canvas in Chapter 2, it is now clear to the researcher that the case of TY prompts many general and specific questions about the schooling system that cannot be addressed in a single thesis.

Conclusion

Building on the historical perspective of Chapter 1 and the literature review of Chapter 2, this chapter has attempted to formulate the key research questions and some of the issues associated with conducting the research. The author believes that gathering the data in two distinct phases from a variety of sites and a range of opinions from policy makers proved an excellent illustration of the effectiveness of a case study approach. The process confirmed the validity of Simons' observation:

> It is precisely through the engagement of the case worker in the paradox and living with the tension that that creates, holding it open to disbelief and re-examination, that we eventually come to realise the significance of the event, instance or circumstance and the universal understanding it evokes (Simons, 1996, p. 230).

Focusing on the attitudes of critical actors in particular schools enabled the nuanced portrayal of TY in different sites that follows in Chapter 4. The exploration of the views of policy makers and shapers brought into sharp relief some of the ethical predicaments that can arise in a relatively small system, particularly when the researcher is perceived as an insider. The relationship arising from marrying the research commissioned by the DES to an academic thesis has been somewhat problematic. The researcher somewhat reluctantly acceded to the DES request for a set of recommendations which are included in Chapter 5. It is now the researcher's view that, especially in the light of data from Chapter 6, he would place different emphases on the data.

Chapter 4

School Profiles

Ash School

Ash School is a voluntary secondary school for girls, founded by a religious order of sisters in the early nineteenth century. Its mission statement describes it as '… a Catholic school which aims to cherish the uniqueness of each individual and to develop her full potential'.

Ash School's general catchment area is urban, with the majority of students coming from the school's own feeder primary school and two other large primary schools in two parishes adjacent to the school. A small number of students who live in towns within a 15-mile radius or so also attend. Ash School's physical location is such that there is a large number of local authority houses in the immediate vicinity of the school. This, combined with a sizeable number of students living in private housing, means that students in Ash School come from a mix of backgrounds. In recent years Ash School's enrolment has been in excess of 800 students. TY in Ash School is compulsory.

Introduction and development of TY in Ash School

Ash School had traditionally offered the Intermediate Certificate at the end of Fourth year, so was always a 'six year school'. The TY programme began in Ash School in 1990, four years before it was mainstreamed nationally. Both Principal and coordinator in Ash School articulated strong convictions about the compulsory nature of the year, which is based on the school's view of a

developmental educational cycle from Year 1 through to Year 6. The Principal says:

> I believe that if Transition Year was an option in my school, honestly it wouldn't say much for Transition Year. If some students can go from 3rd to 5th year without losing out, does it mean that the others (those who do TY) just have a nice, cosy experience? … I see it (TY) as an essential part of their development.

According to the Principal, it is the creativity and commitment of the teaching staff that has contributed strongly to TY's success: ' … an awful lot of this is down to the teacher who comes forward with the idea and has the creativity to do it.'

The Principal also describes a programme that was well-planned from the outset, with well-structured modules and the expertise of the coordinator – 'a mini-Principal' – as key factors in the successful development of the programme in Ash School.

Given a very definite vision at the outset about TY, has the programme been modified or adapted since, and what factors have shaped such adjustments? The coordinator observes:

> Firstly, at the start we were very idealistic. Secondly, we were very green, as in naïve. For example, one of the first things we did starting out was a textbook, a properly typed and bound textbook for every single subject. And that was a mistake. It was a mistake, because what that was doing was putting us into a rigid subject content and structure, which doesn't hang well with Transition Year. It didn't allow for flexibility. It didn't allow for the fact that you might have mixed ability in Irish, mixed ability in Maths or whatever.

Hence an early adjustment was to get rid of these textbooks. The school also actively encouraged teachers in subject areas to work together, often getting teachers to rotate classes. For example, in core subjects, a class group might have three different teachers during the year, each focusing on a distinct area of expertise. The coordinator points out that, for example, teaching TY Irish to the same group for the whole year can be very demanding. Developing a modular

approach gives variety to teachers and students while keeping a clear focus on learning.

Ash School's assessment system is also being continually developed. Reflecting the modular structure, the original idea was that assessment would take place three times during the year. There was an assessment page for each subject. However, it was soon decided that with 14 core modules and 3 optional modules at any one time, 51 pages represented an overload of assessment and reporting. According to the coordinator:

> That was totally unreal. Instead we devised a report that focused on six particular things. They were content, effort, initiative, independence, assignments and equipment. One effect of this was that the student who was academically very weak, but tried very hard, could get a positive report. Another development was that in 1997 the school introduced a tutor/pupil evaluation at the end of each module. It's personal, it's personal development, it's attitudes to authority, how I have worked in group work, how I have worked with my friends, and so on, and they have to rate themselves, 1 to 5. The one at the end of the year is sent home.

TY concludes with each student being presented with a folder in which there may be anything from between 5 and 25 certificates. In all, 56 or 57 different certificates are available for various parts of the TY programme.

Description of TY Programme at Ash School

For the school year 2003–04, Ash School produced a 22-page booklet on TY with the opening statement:

> The Transition Year programme in Ash School has been devised for the enrichment of the students' learning experiences, with the purpose of laying a solid foundation for the Leaving Certificate programme. Each girl has the opportunity to develop her own skills and talents, and to apply them diligently in a process of independent learning. I am happy that the staff of Ash School has committed itself totally to this process, and I can assure you that each student will find Transition Year a beneficial experience.

The booklet restates many of the points made in the Department's *Guidelines for Schools* (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c). For example, 'A Transition Year Programme is not part of the Leaving Certificate programme and should not be seen as an opportunity for spending three years rather than two years studying the Leaving Certificate programme.'

The one-year interdisciplinary TY programme is regarded as 'broad and flexible'. It is based on 43 periods per week, with 74 per cent of the time being spent on 'Core Subject' material and 26 per cent on optional subjects. The optional subjects run for ten weeks. Two groupings, column A and column B, take four periods per week, while column C takes three – one treble period. The optional subjects are presented as follows:

TABLE 4.1 OPTIONAL SUBJECTS IN ASH SCHOOL

A	B	C
Beginners' Science	Beginners' German	Art Craft
Biology	German to LC *	Art Painting
Chemistry	Spanish (Ab initio) *	Handcraft
Physics	Spanish to LC *	Woodwork
Electronics	Tourism Awareness	Cookery (JC)
Computer Applications	Enterprise Studies	Beginners' Cookery
Media Studies	Youth Leadership	Theatre Studies
Business Studies	Biology	
Philosophy	School Garden Project	
*	Computer Applications	

* Remediation in English is available as an extra option in column A	*German for LC is taken for two modules (one other selection).* *Spanish (ab initio) is taken for the full year (no other selection) .* *'Continuation' Spanish (to LC) is taken for one module*

The booklet includes a short note on each subject and module. The emphasis on active learning is a striking feature of these descriptions, e.g. 'table quizzes and dance form part of the programme' (Gaeilge); '... students undertake a literature project or a 'write -a-book' project and/or produce a class magazine' (English);

'emphasis is on practical skills and the ability to carry out instructions through doing laboratory experiments' (Chemistry).

Additional information in the booklet includes sections on the following: work experience; special events such as visits by poets, playwrights, environmental activists; main project – every student must produce a major unit of work on any topic of her choice by mid-March; overseas trips; other trips; overseas study; Gaisce – The President's Award; extra-curricular awards; certification; as well as a list of important dates for TY.

Timetable

The make-up of the weekly timetable for a particular year group is one of the clearest manifestations of a school's educational values. The TY arrangements in Ash School indicate a range of imagination and innovation as well as the complexity and flexibility associated with devising a TY programme for five base class groups. As indicated above, dividing the year into three distinct blocks facilitates students in encountering a wide variety of learning experiences.

TABLE 4.2 WEEKLY TY TIMETABLE IN ASH SCHOOL

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Period 1 38 mins	T1 Religious Ed T1 T2 Career Guid. T2 T3 Soc+Pol St.T3 T4 Soc+Pol St.T4 T5 Religious Ed T5	Cookery T38 Crafts T39 Technology T40 Art T29	T1 Soc+Pol St.T17 T2 French T12 T3 English T13 T4 French T11 T5 Soc+Pol St.T22	T1 English T16 T2 Media St. T19 T3 English T13 T4 English T14 T5 Soc+Pol St T17	T1 English T16 T2Religious Ed T20 T3 Physical Ed T41 T4 English T14 T5 English T30
Period 2 38 mins	Irish T6, T4, T7, T8, T9, T10	Cookery T38 Crafts T39 Technology T40 Art T29	German T14 Enterprise St T33 Computer S T34 Gardening T35 Tourism A T36 Spanish T26 Youth Lead T37	T1 Soc+Pol St T31 T2 Soc+Pol St T17 T3 Religious Ed.T32 T4 French T11 T5 Research T22	T1 French T11 T2 French T12 T3 Physical Ed T41 T4 Career Guid. T2 T5 French T15
Period 3 38 mins	T1 Research T11 T2 French T12 T3 English T13 T4 English T14 T5 French T15	Cookery T38 Crafts T39 Technology T40 Art T29 Theatre St. T9	Irish T6, T4, T7, T8, T9, T10	Mathematics T23, T24, T7, T25, T26, T27	T1 Religious Ed TI T2 English T5 T3 French T21 T4 Soc+Pol St T4 T5 Thinking Skills T11
Period 4 38 mins	T1 English T16 T2 Thinking Skills T11 T3 Soc+Pol StT17 T4 Religious Ed T18 T5 Media St. T19	Mathematics T23, T24, T7, T25, T26, T27	T1 Thinking Skills T11 T2 Physical Ed T41 T3 Research Skills T13 T4 English T14 T5 English T30	T1 Religious Ed T1 T2 English T5 T3 Art Apprec. T44 T4 Research T14 T5 Physical Ed T41	Biology T42 M.Ed. T31 Computer T37 Business St. T43 Chemistry T27 Philosophy T30 Physics T45 MED T17
Period 5 38 mins	T1 French T11 T2 Religious Ed T20 T3 French T21 T4 Soc+Pol St.. T17 T5 Soc+Pol St. T22	T1 Soc+Pol St. T31 T2 Religious Ed T20 T3 Soc+Pol St.T3 T4 English T14 T5 English T30	T1 English T16 T2 Physical Ed T41 T3Religious Ed T32 T4 Thinking Skills T11 T5 Art Apprec. T29	T1 French T11 T2 Art Appreciation T44 T3 French T21 T4 Media St. T19 T5 Physical Ed T41	Biology T42 M.Ed. T31 Computer T37 Business St. T43 Chemistry T27 Philosophy T30 Physics T45 M. Ed T17
	LUNCH BREAK	LUNCH BREAK	LUNCH BREAK	LUNCH BREAK	LUNCH BREAK
Period 6 38 mins	Mathematics T23, T24, T7, T25, T26, T27	Irish T6, T4, T7, T8, T9, T10	T1 Art Apprec. T28 T2 English T5 T3 Career GuiT2 T4 Physical Ed T41 T5 Soc +Pol St. T17	T1 Physical Ed T16 T2 French T12 T3 Thinking Skills T11 T4Religious Ed T18 T5 English T30	T1 Soc+Pol St. T31 T2 Research T12 T3 English T13 T4 French T11 T5 Religious Ed T5
Period 7	T1 Career Guid. T28 T2 English T5	T1 English T16 T2 Soc+Pol St. T13	T1 Media St. T19 T2 Soc+Pol St. T17 T3 Soc+Pol	T1 Physical EdT16 T2 Soc+Pol St	German T14 Enterprise St T33 Computer S T34

38 mins	T3 Media St. T19 T4 Art Appreciation T29 T5 English T30	T3 French T21 T4 Religious Ed T18 T5 French T15	St .T3 T4 Physical Ed T41 T5 Religious Ed. T5	T13 T3 Soc+Pol St T3 T4 Soc+Pol St T4 T5 French T15	Gardening T35 Tourism A T36 Spanish T26 Youth Lead T37
Period 8 38 mins	T1 Soc+Pol St T31 T2 Soc+Pol St T13 T3Religious Ed T32 T4 French T11 T5 Career Guid T28	T1 French T11 T2 English T5 T3 English T13 T4 Soc+Pol St.T4 T5 Soc+Pol St.T22	Biology T42 M.Ed. T31 Computer T37 Business St. T43 Chemistry T27 Philosophy T30 Physics T45 M. Ed T17	German T14 Enterprise St T33 Computer S T34 Gardening T35 Tourism A T36 Spanish T26 Youth Lead T37	Mathematics T23, T24, T7, T25, T26, T27
Period 9 38 mins	German T14 Enterprise St T33 Computer S T34 Gardening T35 Tourism A T36 Spanish T26 Youth Lead T37		Biology T42 M.Ed. T31 Computer T37 Business St. T43 Chemistry T27 Philosophy T30 Physics T45 M.Ed T17	Irish T6, T4, T7, T8, T9, T10	

Colour Codes : Single period Double period Triple Period Teacher teaches more than one subject or to two class groups

The five base classes are arranged on a mixed-ability basis. The classes for Irish and Maths are set and divided into six rather than five groups. According to the Principal, this enables remediation for those who struggle with the subject while providing challenging classes for those aspiring to higher LC papers. The flexibility of TY is also evident in the way Ash School allocates a single period to some components, two to others, three to some and four to the more 'core' features.

Forty-five different teachers teach TY classes in Ash School. However, 21 of these either teach the same group for more than one subject/module or teach two different TY groups. From a teaching perspective, this arrangement of TY, as with the rotating three block, allows teachers to specialise in a particular area, for example, T19 teaches Media Studies to each of the five classes. The research class is also worth noting, as in each case the allocated teacher is also teaching the class group another subject (English, French or Social and Political Studies). This is a good example of avoiding the fragmentation that can arise when offering a broad range of experiences. Contact with numerous teachers can inhibit the development of the stronger student–teacher relationships that the students and the teachers in this study highlight. In Ash School a typical TY student is likely to be taught each week by approximately 12–13 teachers and by about 18 during the course of the year.

Asked if the main strengths of the programme arise from the initial time spent planning, the compulsory nature of the programme and its modular structure, the Principal acknowledges them as very important, but would put 'teacher commitment' ahead of all others. In particular, this Principal draws attention to the crucial role played by the coordinator. The goal has been to get a good coordinator to work with the team of teachers. Tutors for each class, chosen for their attitudes and skills in relation to TY, are also important. The Principal is conscious of the value of time-tabling tutors and coordinator for extensive contact with the TY students.

Because the role of the TY coordinator is seen as so demanding, the Principal has tried to keep the coordinator's formal class contact time to about 14 hours per week. This enables the coordinator to spend more time planning, organising, following up individual students and keeping in touch with teachers. The Principal describes the TY coordinator as 'a mini-Principal' for TY, coordinating and planning, in particular, the out-of-school part of the programme.

The Principal's faith in the coordinator is very evident:

> (He) is a super organiser. He has everything documented. He has paper work ready for the tutors to hand out to the kids at the beginning of the year, setting their objectives and so on. He has them all filed away. Come May he'll hand them back, get them to evaluate them, do a self appraisal on where they're at … They will do a critique of Transition Year themselves … He will come in, 'there's the finding of what this year's bunch thought about it' … He just gets on with it. He organised the trips, including the ones to France.

The Principal acknowledges that this 'strength' of a TY programme also makes it vulnerable. Too much can rest of the shoulders of one individual. The coordinator recognises this also: 'It's an issue that I would say probably militates against other people coming in (to TY coordination), as they see it as, let's say, "my baby".'

Benefits

With both Principal and coordinator, many responses to questions about TY revert to the compulsory nature of the programme in Ash School. Asked to identify the main strength of the programme, the coordinator doesn't hesitate:

> I see number one as the fact that it (TY) is compulsory, that every child does it. Every child gets the same opportunity in Fourth year, and then, when it comes to Fifth year, the importance of it is that they are all starting off from the same level. You don't have some people who have done lots of stuff in Fourth year and are more mature. There's a much greater maturity level amongst some Fifth years than there would be if only a small number had done Transition Year. The other thing is that the bonding that has started in Transition Year, and new friendships, tend to continue on into Fifth year. Bonding and friendship is important and it all stems from the fact that it's a compulsory year. Another advantage of it being compulsory is that

every teacher in the school, because it's a core part of the school, can be involved.

Surely there are some students and their parents who wish to go straight on to a LC programme after the Junior Certificate? Both Principal and coordinator state that a small number of students change from Ash School each year in order to avoid Transition Year. They point out that it is a small number and both believe that such a change is the students' loss.

The coordinator believes that the benefits of TY are also seen when teaching students on the LC programme:

> Because of the methodology that's been used in Transition Year, it makes teaching Fifth years much, much easier because you approach – I think most teachers approach – senior cycle students in a totally different way than they approach Junior Cycle students. The change in approach to senior cycle students in Fourth year makes life an awful lot easier. I know in the old days it was much more difficult to go straight from a Junior Cert., spoonfed child, to Fifth year where they were expected to do a certain amount of work themselves. Fourth year facilitates that transition.

The coordinator highlights the learning involved in meeting deadlines. Students are given longer time frames to complete project work, essays and other assignments. It is a conscious shift away from giving homework today, 'to be completed tonight'. Of course, there are problems with extended work, 'but they kind of sort themselves out as the year goes on', he maintains.

The coordinator highlights the quality of the relationship between students and teachers in TY as of major significance. Teachers have time to talk with students who '… get to know their teachers much, much better in Fourth year'.

Sampling LC subjects is also seen as an important feature in Ash School. According to the coordinator :

> We would have a lot less changing subjects during Fifth year because they have done taster subjects in Fourth year, say biology, physics, chemistry, whatever. The numbers changing in Fifth year is an awful

lot less than it was and, if it happens, it happens much earlier in the year, because they've at least tasted ten weeks of biology, or whatever, during Transition Year.

Students' views

Students in Ash School are keenly aware that the school is partly defined by the compulsory nature of TY.

> I had heard about it (TY) from Primary School because the whole thing about this school is that you *have* to do Transition Year.
>
> Feena, Third year, Ash School

Third year students indicated that they see the year as different and 'more relaxed' than the Junior Cycle:

> I also think it's a chance, like, you're so stressed out over Third year, completely; we've noticed that this year, people get so stressed. At least next year you'll start to get to know the people again, 'cos you don't have the pressure of exams on you anymore. It's kinda time to come back to yourself or change to a different self.
>
> Feena, Third year, Ash School

> First, it's like a rest year. I mean after your exams, your Junior Cert. exams, and then before you start really studying for your Leaving Cert. That's how I see it.   Donna, Fourth year, Ash School

> … after such a hard year, it'll be nice to get the break.
>
> Maria, Third year, Ash School

They report that a small number of their classmates would prefer to have the option of going directly onto a LC programme, usually with the intention of getting out of school as fast as possible.

> When you come into Fifth year and you see the amount of work you have to do in two years, you kinda think, why couldn't we have started the Leaving Cert. course in Fourth year, or even half way through Fourth year.   Brigid, Fifth year, Ash School

Perhaps because of its compulsory character within the school, Third year students in Ash School appear well informed about the programme and its benefits, and the 'folklore of the schoolyard' seems to be quite positive about TY.

> It (TY) is an opportunity to find out what you want to do with the rest of your life. Like, you can go on work experience and you're not going to have time in Fifth year or Sixth year to figure out because you're going to be studying for the Leaving Cert. and all. I suppose Fourth year is there to figure out what you want to study for and what you want to do with the rest of your life.
>
> Maria, Third year, Ash School

Those interviewed in Fourth, Fifth and Sixth years strongly value the TY experience, with many articulating opinions that they 'grew up a lot' and 'matured' during the year. As the senior cycle students see it, the rich mixture of traditional classroom experiences, new modules, trips, and participation in other events outside the school are offered as part of the explanation of this phenomenon.

> I just think you are so relaxed; you kind of come into yourself more. For the Junior Cert., you're working by yourself and you have to study and you have to work on your own, but in Fourth year, because you're in groups the whole time, you kind of have to integrate more. You become more, I don't know ... I suppose you become more exciting as a person.
>
> Lisa, Fifth year, Ash School

> … you get your two weeks' work experience which matures you before you can go into Fifth or Sixth year.
>
> Barbara, Fifth year, Ash School

Quite a number of the more senior students indicate an awareness that Ash School's programme is more varied than that operating in some other schools.

> Court Studies and the module on Lateral Thinking, they were really good. Diane, Fifth year, Ash School

I like all the different subjects. I really liked woodwork. We got to do woodwork as one of our modules and I had never done anything like that before and I really enjoyed that.

Una, Fifth year, Ash School

I took up Spanish as well in Fourth year. I'd never even thought of doing it. It covers the whole Junior Cert. course and you can take it up then for your Leaving if you want to ... And I have basic Spanish now.

Mairéad, Sixth year, Ash School

Myself and two friends did the Futuristic Fashion Show. That was the highlight. We got into the finals and that was a great experience.

Lisa, Fifth year, Ash School

Students speak of developing strong bonds of friendship with fellow TY students during the year.

I enjoyed having another year in school. I kind of like school, though I don't want to stay here forever. I'll be glad to be finished next year but I am glad that I had, not a doss year, but an extra year with a lot of mixing with everybody else from the school.

Diane, Fifth year, Ash School

They also value the improved relationships between students and teachers that develop during TY, both inside and outside classrooms. Opportunities for students to voice their opinions during TY classes are seen as engaging and confidence-building.

The teacher kind of talks to you in the class. They just talk to you. In Third year they just said 'do this', 'do that'. But now they're kind of talking and giving, and we're giving back answers.

Cáit, Fourth year, Ash School

In English there was a lot of leeway. We had a great English teacher. It was really good because, as well as discussion, we got to write poetry and we studied poetry and it wasn't just all about covering the novels, the way it was in Third year.

Donna, Fourth year, Ash School

He listens to us. And he kind of likes listening to our views and what we want to do … I think that's good teaching.

Deirdre, Fourth year, Ash School

Many students contrast the more relaxed nature of TY with what they see as the very pressurised life of students in Third year and Sixth year.

… in Third year you're underlining things and you're told to learn it, but in Transition Year it's not so much about opening the book and learning it, it's … everyone kind of participates in class and gives ideas. It's not just the teacher teaching; it's us helping each other as well, and we're discussing a lot.

Deirdre, Fourth year, Ash School

Work experience was highlighted by many students in Ash School as especially beneficial and the community service focus in some placements is well appreciated.

First of all (TY) is really good because of the work experience. If I hadn't done it – I did my work experience with mentally handicapped kids, I wouldn't have found my vocation. That's what I want to do, like. Before I was just thinking generally of nursing but I hadn't even thought of doing anything with the mentally handicapped.

Mairéad, Sixth year, Ash School

Teachers' views

Teachers who responded to the questionnaire were unanimous that TY gives students a broad educational experience, advances students' maturity and enables students to become more confident, more socially aware and assists students in clarifying their career goals.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 8 (a) TY gives students a broad educational experience	9	67%	33%	0%	0%	0%
Q. 8 (c) TY advances students' maturity	9	67%	33%	0%	0%	0%
Q. 11 (a) Students become more confident	9	44%	56%	0%	0%	0%
Q. 11 (g) Students become more socially aware	9	44%	56%	0%	0%	0%

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 11 (k) TY assists students clarify career goals	9	33%	67%	0%	0%	0%

Time to mature, develop some self-direction, broaden perspectives and social awareness.   Teacher 24, Ash School

Maturity, skills development, confidence, opportunity to reflect, relax and renew.   Teacher 27, Ash School

These teachers also believe that the Ash School TY programme is well thought-out and well tailored to students' needs.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 9 (a) Our programme is well thought-out	9	33%	67%	0%	0%	0%
Q. 9 (b) Our programme is well tailored to our students' needs	9	22%	67%	11%	0%	0%

We have a model TY programme, in my opinion.

Teacher 24, Ash School

A majority of teachers believe that the programme has breadth and balance, that it provides students and teachers with good opportunities for learning beyond the classroom, that the programme is well coordinated and that Ash School has a progressive approach to evaluation.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 9 (c) Our programme has breadth and balance	9	56%	44%	7%	0%	0%
Q. 9 (d) Our programme presents students and teachers with good opportunities for learning beyond the classroom	8	50%	38%	13%	0%	0%
Q. 16 (a) Our TY programme is well coordinated	9	67%	22%	11%	0%	0%

Q. 9 (g) Our approach to evaluation is progressive	9	0%	67%	22%	0%	11%

Most teachers also regard the written programme as very good.

Q. 16 (c) Our written TY programmee is very good	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
	9	44%	44%	11%	0%	0%

Furthermore, a majority of teachers reject the notion that students show little interest in TY. A majority state that they believe that, following TY, students are better equipped for LC, that students develop well in the absence of exam pressure, that they become more independent learners, develop technical skills, and have their thinking skills and problem-solving skills enhanced. In addition, a majority of teachers in Ash School reject the idea that TY has a low status among students or teachers; they also reject the contention that teachers find mixed-ability classes difficult.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 8 (d) Students are better equipped for a Leaving Certificate programme after a TY	9	44%	44%	0%	11%	0%
Q. 8 (b) Students develop well in the absence of examination pressure	9	56%	33%	11%	0%	0%
Q. 8 (f) Students become more independent learners through TY	9	56%	22%	22%	0%	11%
Q. 11 (c) Students develop technical skills	9	11%	78%	11%	0%	0%
Q. 11 (b) Students' thinking and problem-solving skills are enhanced through TY	9	44%	44%	11%	0%	0%
Q. 11 (h) The TY programme has low status among students	9	0%	11%	44%	44%	4%
Q. 15 (f) The programme has a low status among teachers	9	0%	11%	67%	22%	0%
Q. 14 (b) Teachers find mixed-ability classes difficult	9	0%	11%	89%	0%	0%

Student–teacher relationship is more adult.

Teacher 20, Ash School

A majority also believe that those who follow TY achieve higher LC results, become more socially competent and that TY offers students intellectual challenge and orientates them to adult and working life.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 11 (f) Students who follow a TY programme achieve higher results in the Leaving Certificate that those who don't	9	22%	44%	11%	0%	22%
Q. 11 (i) Students become more socially competent	9	44%	56%	14%	0%	14%
Q. 9 (e) Our programme provides students with intellectual challenge	8	0%	75%	13%	0%	13%
Q. 8 (e) TY orientates students well to adult and working life	9	44%	44%	0%	0%	11%

More than three-quarters see students becoming more motivated and self-directed as learners, regard TY as promoting teachers' professional development, are of the opinion that teachers respond well to the freedom and flexibility to design programmes, and that skills developed through TY enhance their teaching in other years. Three-quarters of respondents indicate that they like teaching TY classes and an even higher percentage indicate that they like using active teaching and learning methodologies.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 11 (j) Students become more motivated and self-directed as learners	7	11%	67%	22%	0%	0%
Q. 14 (a) Teaching TY promotes the professional development of teachers	9	0%	78%	22%	0%	0%
Q. 14 (c) Teachers respond well to the freedom and flexibility to design relevant programmes	8	0%	87%	0%	0%	13%
Q. 15 (d) Teachers develop skills in TY which enhance their teaching in other years	9	11%	78%	11%	0%	0%
Q. 15 (a) I like teaching Transition Year classes	8	25%	50%	25%	0%	0%
Q.15 (f) I like using active teaching and learning methodologies	8	25%	63%	12%	0%	0%

Opinions among teachers in Ash School are divided about the merits of a three-year LC programme, about whether TY develops academic skills, about the ease or otherwise of devising and operating different forms of assessment, about whether teachers would prefer a prescribed syllabus for their subject, and whether there is a lack of resources for TY.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 15 (g) I would prefer a three-year Leaving Certificate programme	8	0%	25%	37%	37%	0%
Q. 11 (d) Students develop academic skills	9	0%	56%	22%	22%	0%
Q. 14 (i) Devising and operating new forms of assessment is difficult	9	22%	56%	22%	0%	0%
Q. 15 (b) I would prefer a prescribed syllabus for my subject	8	13%	37%	37%	0%	13%
Q. 14 (h) Teachers find that there is a lack of resources for TY	9	11%	44%	44%	0%	0%

Mixed attitudes are also evident in regard to questions about more time for planning TY classes with colleagues or for more in-service training.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 15 (i) I would like more time for planning TY classes with colleagues	8	25%	37%	37%	0%	0%
Q. 15 (j) I would like more in-service training for TY	8	25%	37%	37%	0%	0%

Insufficient resources, in-service, textbooks, etc. Lead to unimaginative teaching and assessment methods.

Teacher 23, Ash School

Divided opinion is evident as to how much TY promotes teamwork among teachers or how much it has helped their professional development or whether class sizes are too big.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 14 (j) TY promotes teamwork among teachers	9	11%	44%	33%	0%	11%
Q. 14 (a) Teaching TY promotes the professional development of teachers	9	0%	78%	22%	0%	0%
Q. 16 (e) Class sizes are too big	9	0%	56%	33%	11%	0%

> In early stages encouraged staff development. There are more trips/exchanges in TY so this broadens staff and students alike.
>
> Teacher 12, Ash School

A number of teachers wished to acknowledge the pioneering role that they and some of their colleagues had played in spearheading innovations in TY, but also expressed concern about the danger of the programme going 'stale'.

> I think we probably need a new look. Many staff have gone since we drew up the programme. We haven't accommodated change enough.
>
> Teacher 12, Ash School.

> Students laughed at a Department Inspector when she said our TY was well regarded. They said they'd hate to see the others. TY badly needs an overhaul.   Teacher 12, Ash School

Parents' views

Ash School communicates to parents about the compulsory nature of TY before their children enter First year and remind them regularly of the implications of a six-year cycle. Parents of Third year students are invited to a meeting about TY, at which the rationale and operation and a full outline of the programme are provided. Ash School also provides students and parents with a 22-page booklet about their TY programme.

During TY itself, students and parents are invited to an information night at the end of January. The focus is on their subject choices for Fifth year. The Principal states that 'we get a good response, certainly 80 per cent'. The coordinator conducts an annual evaluation of TY and the results are presented to the parents. At the meetings for parents, the work-experience coordinator talks about placements, explaining the process and what to expect.

Throughout the year, the Principal refers enquiries from parents to the coordinator. She adds that the coordinator puts in a lot of time, on the telephone, checking absences. Principal and coordinator see on-going contact with parents as a key feature of the coordinator's role.

In the survey of teachers' views, those in Ash School were unanimous in agreeing that parents of Third year students are well-informed about TY. They also believe that parents are kept well-informed about events during TY.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 16 (b) Parents of Third year students are well informed about TY	9	67%	33%	0%	0%	0%
Q. 16 (d) Parents are kept well informed about activities and events during TY	9	56%	44%	0%	0%	0%

Specific issues

Despite careful planning and development, not all teachers share the same enthusiasm for the TY project as the coordinator and the tutors, according to the Principal: 'There would be a few people who wouldn't be totally sold on Transition Year.'

The Principal identifies Irish as a subject associated with what she calls 'disenchantment', where students tend not to be motivated unless they are in the Honours LC class. Teachers find it difficult to motivate others in relation to Irish.

> Very difficult to motivate pupils in the core subjects – Irish, English, French and Maths. The pupils have difficulty adjusting to a set syllabus in Fifth year.   Teacher 26, Ash School

This school has, for many years, taught a combined History and Geography module with a strong social and political dimension in TY. The Principal observes that some teachers of History and Geography would 'hate to be put in there'. The Principal points out that the school has gathered many resources to support such

cross-curricular work, investing time, energy and money, but that some teachers 'just are not comfortable with not having the straightforward textbooks'.

The Principal is very aware of the need to maintain 'a work ethic' in TY. Homework is one indicator of this. She says:

> I have a big tradition in saying please, please give them core homework in Irish, English, Maths, French, History, Geography … Four nights a week out of each of those subjects they should have some sort of written, or learning study, set homework.

The school also engages in a lot of project work during TY. The Principal sees this as an attempt to move away from 'being spoonfed, drip style, that you're always doing something tonight for tomorrow'. In TY the message might be 'now instead of getting two pages, you have to do 50 pages, over eight weeks'. She acknowledges that a task given in September may result in panic in early November but sees this as an important step on the road to developing better time-management skills.

As regards the *Guidelines*' emphasis on 'the use of a wide range of teaching/learning methodologies and situations' (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c, p.8), the Principal's view is that 'the creative teachers will use that and they tend to interact a bit with each other'. Her view is that the more enthusiastic teachers are about TY, the more likely they are to use more varied methodologies.

Funding

In Ash School in 2004 all students were expected to pay a subscription of €25 for school facilities. About 85 per cent of students pay this. There is also a voluntary contribution towards a building and development fund of €60, €80 or €100. About 25 per cent of parents pay this.

There are extra payments, for TY, directly related to subject options and trips, e.g. woodwork charges of €6 to €12, depending on the products they make. Trips away from school are charged on an individual basis. Some activities, e.g. a visiting a theatre company, are subsidised and the students asked to pay €2 each.

Beech School

Beech School is a co-educational community college, designated 'disadvantaged'. In 2003–04 there were over 600 students enrolled in the school. The mission statement reads:

> In Beech School we will endeavour to create a stable and affirming environment in which our pupils may improve their life chances. We recognise that through commitment to purpose and self-esteem, the school and its students can help to enrich not only the school environment but also that of the home and wider community.

Beech School has actively engaged with a wide range of curricular and other measures designed to combat disadvantage and offers a variety of interventions and opportunities to its students and their families. Transition Year is a central feature of the school's overall educational provision.

Introduction and development of TY in Beech School

Initially introduced in the early 1990s as a choice between a TY/LC programme and a one-year Vocational and Preparation Training Programme (VPTP 1), in 1995 the choice became between the two-year LCA and a three-year track to the traditional LC, via TY. This continues to be the situation. Approximately 60 per cent of students followed this three-year route in 2003–04, with about 40 per cent of students opting for the LCA immediately after the JC. At the time of the research there had been four different co-ordinators of the programme.

At an initial planning session for the introduction of TY, staff agreed on three core outcomes of TY for their students. They were:
- To improve self-confidence
- To improve interpersonal skills
- To improve communication skills.

The Principal and many of the staff believe that this simple formula has been very effective and they continue with that emphasis today. Each fresh development is tested against whether it will promote these three core outcomes.

The school's website states:

> The Transition Year is an opportunity for students to get a broad educational experience, away from the pressure of formal examinations with a view to increasing the students' maturity before they proceed to further study and/or vocational preparation. It is hoped that students will, during this year, take greater responsibility for their own learning and decision-making and develop a range of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The Transition Year will provide an opportunity for students to reflect on and develop an awareness of the value of education and training in preparing them for the ever changing demands of the adult world of work and relationships.

One of the challenges facing all schools interested in promoting TY among students and their parents concerns language – how to communicate complex ideas in simple, clear language. Beech School is notable in that it attempts to draw attention to activity-based learning:

> The Transition Year will give this broad educational experience in two ways. Firstly, students will be able to study and choose from a big range of subjects (some of which may not be on the school programme already and some of which they have not done before) and also the approach to the subjects will be different from what they have experienced before. A lot of the learning will be activity based. Project work will be very important, emphasis will be placed on team-work, oral work, etc., and problem-solving and personal development will be given a high priority.

The website continues, fleshing out the thinking that informs the school's work experience programme:

> Work experience forms a vital part of Transition Year. It gives students an insight into the world of work, meeting with people in business and industry, gaining personal confidence and valuable experience in different skills. It gives them a sense of responsibility, particularly in the areas of attendance, punctuality and personal grooming.

Description of TY Programme at Beech School

As well as following classes throughout the year in English, Irish, Mathematics, Religious Education, Physical Activities, Personal Development/Lifeskills and the European Computer Driving License (ECDL), students spend a half-year involved in the formation of a mini-company. In addition, 15 subjects are available from which TY students can choose 6 during the course of the year. These subjects are as follows:

Art	Business Studies	Cookery	Development Education	Drama
French	Geography	History	Metalwork	Web Design
Science	Sociology	Spanish	Technical Graphics – CAD	Woodwork

Work experience placement occurs in two one-week blocks, one in the first term and one in the second term.

Timetable

The operation of the timetable in Beech School illustrates considerable imagination and flexibility. While students are registered in their base class, much of the rest of their time is spent following specific choices they have made. For example, each student follows, for half a year each, two of the modules from the subject block Science, First Aid, Cookery. A similar pattern operates for the subject block History, Shaping Space and French. The same is true for the subject block Art, Music and Web Design, though a further variation here is that there is a double class of Music on Mondays and a double class of Drama on Wednesdays for those who make this selection. The same half-year modules offering mini-company and Leisure Studies on Tuesday afternoons ensure that every student participates in a mini-company, and some can choose to do so twice.

The situation is replicated with regard to Computer Studies/Leisure Studies. By setting subjects such as English, Irish and Maths, Beech School sees this as enabling students in these 'core' subjects to be grouped according to their abilities. In Beech School 28 teachers teach TY classes. A typical student is taught by approximately 13 teachers during each week and 19 teachers throughout the course of the year. As with each of the other three schools, the weekly TY

timetable in Beech School is complemented by a range of learning opportunities outside the classroom.

The list of possible 'beyond the classroom' activities offered to students in Beech School is striking, especially when one considers the funding situation in a school designated 'disadvantaged'. Events include a geography field trip to Glendalough, a science trip to Belfast, an in-school performance and workshop with Calypso Theatre Company, a religious retreat, a school-based Arts week, participation in a university's science week, a short course in journalism in association with a local newspaper, a visit to a mosque, a designated film day, engagement with the Concern child labour project, participation in an Institute of Technology's web design competition, a visit to an RDS mathematics lecture, a pen-pals project with Rwanda, and specific computer workshops. Beech School also offers a particular programme in youth leadership training, class hillwalks, a residential trip to an adventure centre, a ski-trip to Italy and trips to primary schools where TY students share their scientific knowledge.

TABLE 4.3 WEEKLY TY TIMETABLE IN BEECH SCHOOL

c	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Reg. 10 mins	1 Registration T1 2 Registration T2 3 Registration T3	1 Registration T1 2 Registration T2 3 Registration T3	1 Registration T1 2 Registration T2 3 Registration T3	1 Registration T1 2 Registration T2 3 Registration T3	1 Registration T1 2 Registration T2 3 Registration T3
Period 1 40 mins	1 English T4 2 English T5 3 English T6	1 Life Skills T11 2 Religious Ed. T17 3 Religious Ed. T20	1 Gaeilge T21 2 Gaeilge T22 3 Gaeilge T23	1 Mini-company T24 2 Mini-company T3 3 Drama T25	1 English T4 2 English T5 3 English T6
Period 2 40 mins	1 Science T7 2 First Aid T8 3 Cookery T9	1 Gaeilge T21 2 Gaeilge T22 3 Gaeilge T23	1 Computer St. T18 2 Religious Ed. T17 3 Computer St. T19	1 Mini-company T24 2 Mini-company T3 3 Drama T25	1 Keyboard Skills T18 2 Library 3 Life Skills T19
Period 3 40 mins	1 Science T7 2 First Aid T8 3 Cookery T9	1 English T4 2 English T5 3 English T6	1 Web Design T18 2 Religious Ed. T17 3 Computer St. T19	1 Gaeilge T21 2 Gaeilge T22 3 Gaeilge T23	1 Library T28 3 Life Skills T11 3 Life Skills T29
Period 4 40 mins	1 Religious Ed T10 2 Life Skills T11 3 Library T12	1 Computer St. T18 2 Computer St. T2 3 Computer St. T19	1 Art T16 2 Drama T25 3 Commerce T2	1 Maths T13 2 Maths T14 3 Maths T15	1 Science T7 2 First Aid T8 3 Cookery T9
Period 5 35 mins	1 Maths T13 2 Maths T14 3 Maths T15	1 Maths T13 2 Maths T14 3 Maths T15	1 Art T16 2 Drama T25 3 Web Design T2	1 Life Skills T28 2 Computer St. T2 3 Computer St. T10	1 Science T7 2 First Aid T8 3 Cookery T9
c	Lunch Break	Lunch Break	Lunch Break	Lunch Break	Lunch Break
Period 6 40 mins	1 Art T16 2 Music T17 3 Web Design T2	1.Mini-company T24 2 Mini-company T3 3 Leisure St. T18	1 History T26 2 Shaping Space T3 3 French T27	1 English T4 2 English T5 3 English T6	1 Religious Ed. T19 2 Keyboard Skills T2 3 Religious Ed. T17
Period 7 40 mins	1 Art T16 2 Music T17 3 Web Design T2	1 Mini-company T24 2 Mini-companT3 3 Leisure St. T18	1 History T26 2 Shaping Space T3 3 French T27	1 English T4 2 English T5 3 English T6	1 Religious Ed. T19 2 Keyboard Skills T2 3 Religious Ed. 17
Period 8 40 mins	1 Computer St. T18 2 Computer St. T2	1 Mini-company T24 2 Mini-company T3	1 English T4 2 English T5 3 English T6	1 History T26 2 Shaping Space T3 3 French T27	1 Maths T13 2 Maths T14 3 Maths T15

	3 Computer St. T19	3 Leisure St. T18			
Period 9 40 mins	1 Computer St. T18 2 Computer St. T2 3 Computer St. T19			1 History T26 2 Shaping Space T3 3 French T27	

Colour Codes : Single period Double period Triple Period Teacher teaches more than one subject

TY students can also participate in the Mini-Marathon, the Schools Cross Country event in Santry, a safety course with Dublin Fire Brigade, a cultural tour of Dublin, Gaisce – the President's Award, and, somewhat ominously, a science investigation of 'a murdered teacher'!

Choosing to do TY

For Third year students in Beech School, the fundamental choice they face after the JC is whether to do the established LC or the LCA. If they opt for the LC, TY automatically becomes part of the three-year package. The Principal and TY coordinators believe that TY gives students the time and space to develop confidence and social skills as well as building an academic and motivational platform from which they can aspire to high achievement in the LC and beyond. They point out that the evidence is clear within their school situation that since introducing TY, LC achievements and participation at Third level have increased significantly.

All Third year students are interviewed about their post-Junior Certificate choices. Two lists are then posted in the staffroom and all teachers can make suggestions about whether or not they think a student's choice has been appropriate. Consequent on this, a small number of students may be interviewed again, usually by the guidance counsellor and another member of the TY team.

> The thrust of the interview is around why they chose a particular course and what it means to them. For those with a behavioural problem, the message is clear: you may get this course but you will have to behave; you will have to sign a contract to say you are agreeable to certain things. Every student is interviewed one way or another.

Details of the choices are made clear to parents at a public meeting for all Third year students and their parents.

While convinced that the school's policy is the correct one, the Principal and coordinators also acknowledge that there can be casualties. As a former coordinator puts it:

> … over the years, we would have lost a number of kids between the Fourth year and the Sixth year. And you wonder if they had only two years would they have finished it out? Was three years just too much for them? And now they have left and haven't a Leaving Cert. at all. And the opposite side of that is: what kind of a Leaving Certificate? They might have dropped out anyway. While I favour three years to Leaving Cert., sometimes I see kids, particularly about half-way through Sixth year and they are weary of school; they have had enough.

Benefits

The Principal and the four coordinators in Beech School, as well as many of the teachers, believe that the introduction of TY has had a marked impact on LC participation and achievement, and consequently on students' up-take of places on full-time third-level courses.

All four coordinators also draw attention to TY's impact on subject choice. They point out that, previously, when students had to pick LC subjects in Third year, it was very clear that what one called a 'herd instinct' operated: students selected subjects without much thought. Furthermore, many parents indicated that, as they had not themselves completed a LC, they found it difficult to advise their children on this matter. So, in developing TY, actively seeking to assist students to think about the subjects they might study for LC became an important goal. The school built up a taster programme so that each student in TY can get a flavour of what might be involved in subjects such as History, Home Economics or Engineering for LC. Each of the coordinators remark that they are struck by how seriously students now take LC subject selection, discussing the matter with teachers and guidance counsellors.

This more thoughtful approach to subject choice, the developmental effects of TY, a more focused approach to classwork and study in Fifth and Sixth years and

a variety of other factors are seen by the Principal and the three coordinators as contributing to an improvement in LC examination results. There is also a marked increase in students going on to Institutes of Technology, University and PLC courses. However, rather than attribute this directly to TY, all four are quick to point to a range of initiatives – many specifically targeting disadvantage – that worked together to enable the school to bring this about. They strongly resist any simplistic single cause–effect explanation of their students' increased participation in higher education.

The Principal and coordinators see TY as being particularly effective in promoting maturity among students. They also link TY very strongly with altered student–teacher relationships. The first coordinator contrasts staff relationships with senior cycle students prior to TY's introduction and since.

> Introducing Transition Year fundamentally changed the relationship between the senior students and the teachers. Before that students went from Junior Cert. into Fifth year and did the Leaving Cert. programme for two years. Teachers were frustrated because the youngsters weren't working. The youngsters were frustrated because they wanted a Leaving Cert. but the work that was going with it didn't appeal to them. There was a lot of frustration, a lot of tension. Teachers were pushing and the kids were resisting. With Transition Year the relationship is much easier. The relationship builds up between the students and the teacher (during TY) and remains into Sixth year. I think the activities outside the classroom in Transition Year, hill-walking and other trips, for example, are important in developing and improving teacher–pupil relationships. Of course, the teachers will still go into the role of trying to make them work but I think they would have seen the students in a different role, and so they have a different relationship with them.

Students' views

The Third year students interviewed in Beech School prior to TY tend to highlight their expectations of a year that they see as a welcome break from the examination focus in Third year, the opportunity to engage in a range of enjoyable learning experiences and as strengthening the foundation for LC studies.

I was tempted to skip Fourth year because it was so pressurised in Third year. You just have exams, exams. Because of all the exams and pressure, you start to get sick of school. I was just saying I want to get out of this and 'no', I don't want an extra year, but then, when you look back at it, the advantages (of TY) were good.

<div align="right">Eric, Fifth year, Beech School</div>

You get experience and you get to do different subjects that you wouldn't get to do on a normal year. You mix more and you go more places.

<div align="right">Monica, Fourth year, Beech School</div>

I just think it is an extra year of study to catch up on things that you might have missed in First, Second or Third year and it is also an extra year of study for the Leaving Cert. so it gets you more prepared for that as well.

<div align="right">Lesley, Third year, Beech School</div>

TY students themselves and the Fifth and Sixth years on the LC track contrast the year with their experiences in the Junior Cycle, in particular what they see as much better relationships with their teachers. Trips away from the school appear to play an important role in these changed relationships. Students also indicate that within TY classrooms there are much greater opportunities to voice their opinions and discuss topics of interest. Students welcome this very much. Many senior cycle students in Beech School state that TY helped them mature.

They are not as strict. You get on an awful lot better with the teachers and you have a laugh with them as well. They do teach you, but because you are a bit more mature they treat us as older … I think that is better for us as well.

<div align="right">Tony, Fourth year, Beech School</div>

… (The highlights for me were) trips away. We went to a leadership training course. We went down and mixed with ten other schools. We mixed and learned all different work, about the other schools, made friends and stuff.

<div align="right">Monica, Fourth year, Beech School</div>

> (In TY) you can have a joke with them … They are interested in what you want to do as well and other things about you, not just school.
>
> > Ashley, Fifth Year, Beech School

> I kind of matured more, because I was kind of childish. And I still am kind of childish, but I have more respect for others now. I respect their opinions and ideas, even though I take on what they say and appreciate what they say.
>
> > Tamara, Fourth year, Beech School

When interviewed, LCA students in Beech School tended, in the first instance, to talk about their own decisions to opt for LCA. Most articulated satisfaction with this choice and, indeed, indicated that LCA was proving a very positive experience. Some voiced the impression that TY was an 'easy' year. A view also aired was that teachers gave more attention to TY classes than LCA ones.

> I didn't really want to do three years after the Junior Cert., so I said I'll just do the Leaving Cert. Applied. And I like the way you're assessed all the way through and it's not just one exam at the end, so I said it would be good doing that.
>
> > Bobby, LCA year 2, Beech School

> What's the point of spending a whole year just messing? And when you have that done you have to go on and do another two years … when you just do Leaving Cert. Applied you just get on with it. It's good, it is. You just get through school quicker.
>
> > Darren, LCA year 2, Beech School

> I think you get a lot more attention from the teachers in TY. Because every day they have a teacher. They're never short. Sometimes we're just left with no one.
>
> > Diana, LCA, year 2, Beech School

Teachers' views

Teachers in Beech School who completed the questionnaire were unanimous on a number of points, for example, that TY gives students a broad educational

experience and that students become more confident; 91 per cent of teachers stated that they like teaching TY classes and 97 per cent like using active teaching and learning methodologies.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 8 (a) TY gives students a broad educational experience	32	50%	50%	0%	0%	0%
Q. 11 (a) Students become more confident	32	50%	50%	0%	0%	0%
Q. 15 (a) I like teaching Transition Year classes	32	41%	50%	3%	0%	6%
Q. 15 (f) I like using active teaching and learning methodologies	32	31%	66%	0%	0%	3%

A majority of teachers expressed the view that the school's TY programme is well thought-out, well-tailored to students' needs, has breadth and balance and is well coordinated.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 9 (a) Our programme is well thought-out	31	23%	71%	6%	0%	0%
Q. 9 (b) Our programme is well-tailored to our students' needs	32	28%	59%	13%	0%	0%
Q. 9 (c) Our programme has breadth and balance	32	25%	59%	3%	0%	13%
Q. 16 (a) Our TY programme is well coordinated	32	41%	56%	3%	0%	0%

> Good team involved; very good year-head coordinates well – always open to new ideas. Teacher 16, Beech School

> TY has had a very positive impact on the life of the school. It has changed the relationship between the teachers and the senior students very much for the better. Teacher 78, Beech School

> The TY programme is varied. It gives students time to explore new ideas. It is very well organised, well managed.
>
> Teacher 91, Beech School

A majority is also of the view that the programme presents students and teachers with good opportunities for learning beyond the classroom; that TY advances students' maturity, and orientates them well to adult and working life; that students develop well in the absence of examination pressure and are better equipped for a LC; and that they become more independent learners.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 9 (d) Our programme presents students and teachers with good opportunities for learning beyond the classroom	32	34%	59%	6%	0%	0%
Q. 8 (c) TY advances students' maturity	32	66%	28%	3%	3%	0%
Q. 8 (e) TY orientates students well to adult and working life	32	25%	69%	3%	0%	3%
Q. 8 (b) Students develop well in the absence of examination pressure	32	25%	59%	13%	3%	0%
Q. 8 (d) Students are better equipped for a Leaving Certificate programme after a TY	32	34%	47%	13%	3%	3%
Q. 8 (f) Students become more independent learners through TY	32	16%	65%	13%	0%	9%

> In my opinion we have an awful lot more students going on to third level. The students in disadvantaged areas benefit greatly from the extra year and they are more mature about decision-making.
>
> Teacher 93, Beech School

A majority is also of the view that the programme in Beech School offers intellectual challenge, developing academic and technical skills, that students' thinking and problem-solving skills are enhanced through TY, that they become more socially aware, more socially competent, and that TY helps students to clarify career goals. Furthermore, a majority in Beech School agree that students become more motivated and self-directed as learners.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 9 (e) Our programme provides students with intellectual challenge	32	28%	59%	13%	0%	0%
Q. 11 (d) Students develop academic skills	32	3%	69%	19%	3%	6%
Q. 11 (c) Students develop technical skills	32	16%	63%	9%	4%	12%

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 11 (b) Students' thinking and problem-solving skills are enhanced through TY	32	6%	91%	3%	0%	0%
Q. 11 (g) Students become more socially aware	32	22%	75%	3%	0%	0%
Q. 11 (i) Students become more socially competent	32	38%	59%	0%	0%	3%
Q. 11 (k) TY assists students clarify career goals	32	9%	72%	13%	0%	6%
Q. 11 (j) Students become more motivated and self-directed as learners	9	3%	66%	22%	3%	6%

I find for the quieter student it gives them a chance to become involved. They often become more vocal and articulate, voice opinions, etc. Allows leaders to develop. Both new leaders and students who would normally be cheer leaders become focused and good at delegation.

Teacher 16, Beech School

There is majority support for the view that TY promotes the professional development of teachers, that teachers respond well to the freedom and flexibility to design relevant programmes, that TY promotes teamwork among teachers and that teachers develop skills in TY that enhance their teaching in other years. Forty-six per cent of teachers in Beech School find mixed-ability classes difficult, though a majority of those surveyed state that they like teaching such groupings.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 14 (a) Teaching TY promotes the professional development of teachers	31	16%	68%	7%	0%	8%
Q. 14 (c) Teachers respond well to the freedom and flexibility to design relevant programmes	31	29%	65%	0%	7%	0%
Q. 14 (j) TY promotes teamwork among teachers	31	19%	71%	6%	0%	3%
Q. 15 (d) Teachers develop skills in TY which enhance their teaching in other years	31	19%	74%	0%	3%	3%
Q. 14 (b) Teachers find mixed-ability classes difficult	32	8%	38%	38%	6%	6%
Q. 15 (c) I like teaching mixed-ability classes	32	9%	63%	16%	0%	12%

A majority of teachers in Beech School welcome the varied forms of assessment in TY. In addition, the assessment techniques are seen by a majority of teachers as

appropriate, though more than half state that devising and operating new forms of assessment is difficult.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 15 (e) I welcome the varied forms of assessment in TY	32	9%	62%	9%	0%	9%
Q. 9 (f) The assessment techniques used in TY are appropriate	32	13%	69%	9%	0%	9%
Q. 14 (i) Devising and operating new forms of assessment is difficult	31	3%	65%	29%	0%	3%

In Beech School a majority of teachers believe that the parents of Third year students are well informed about TY and that parents are kept well informed about activities and events during the year.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 16 (b) Parents of 3rd year students are well informed about TY	32	41%	50%	0%	0%	9%
Q. 16 (d) Parents are kept well informed about activities and events during TY	32	25%	50%	6%	3%	5%

A majority reject the idea that teachers would prefer a three-year LC (65 per cent), that students show little interest in TY or that TY has a low status among students and teachers in Beech School. A majority of teachers in Beech School would like more time for planning TY classes with colleagues and more in-service training.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 14 (g) Teachers would prefer a three-year Leaving Cert. programme	32	10%	19%	65%	0%	6%
Q. 11 (e) Students show little interest in TY	32	0%	13%	50%	31%	6%
Q. 11 (h) The TY programme has low status among students	32	0%	28%	59%	13%	0%
Q. 15 (f) The programme has a low status among teachers	31	0%	3%	74%	19%	3%
Q. 15 (i) I would like more time for planning TY classes with colleagues	32	25%	53%	16%	0%	6%
Q. 15 (j) I would like more in-service training for TY	32	31%	50%	9%	0%	9%

Until students become exposed to TY it has a low status.

Teacher 34, Beech School

It's a long time since there was some decent in-service – a lot of new staff have come on board – even from a supersub point of view there should be 'staff-day' time put by to involve everyone.

Teacher 31, Beech School

The areas where opinions among teachers were particularly divided included the quality of the school's written programme, whether the school's approach to evaluation is progressive, whether teachers would prefer a prescribed syllabus for their subjects, whether there is a lack of resources for TY and whether class sizes are too big.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 16 (c) Our written TY programme is very good	32	12%	47%	9%	0%	31%
Q. 9 (g) Our approach to evaluation is progressive	32	13%	47%	16%	0%	25%
Q. 15 (b) I would prefer a prescribed syllabus for my subject	31	10%	29%	45%	6%	10%
Q. 14 (h) Teachers find that there is a lack of resources for TY	31	8%	42%	36%	0%	13%

I teach IT; class sizes are unacceptably big; students have to share PCs and are expected to get ECDL.   Teacher 96, Beech School

59 per cent of teachers agree that TY is well embedded in the system.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 21b (b) Transition Year is now firmly embedded in the Irish education system	32	0%	59%	38%	0%	3%

I feel TY should be a compulsory part of the Irish Education System. The fact that some schools have abolished it suggests that it is not educationally beneficial.   Teacher 93, Beech School

Parents' views

Interviews with students, the coordinators and the Principal in Beech School serve to highlight a parent population that has little direct experience of senior cycle education. Teachers remark that parents often point out that they themselves were working full-time from the age of 14 years and express a wish that their children

join the workforce as soon as possible. The third coordinator believes that it is not so much a resistance to further education that stops children remaining in full-time education, but the accepted norms within working-class culture that the ideal activity for 16–17 years olds is to be in paid employment.

Other parents, according to the Principal and coordinators, have a great openness to education for their children but need the details of pathways and requirements to be made very explicit. Some students made it clear that their parents understand little about subject choice, the intricacies of the points system or CAO procedures. The third coordinator remarked that when interviewing Third year students about doing TY, many tend to be dismissive of their parents' views on the decision, sometimes commenting that 'they just don't know'.

At the information meeting for parents, this coordinator says there are very few questions immediately after the school's presentation. However, when the parents are broken up into small groups, a lot of questions emerge: why do they have to do an extra year in school?; will they drop behind?; is it a 'doss year'?; might they drop out of school?; would they be better going straight into employment?; if they go on work experience will they want to return to school? The coordinators and Principal state that a lot of reassurance is required.

When Beech School introduced TY as part of a six-year cycle to LC, some parents' resistance was strong. The first coordinator recalls:

> A couple of them came to us requesting that their children take the year off to work and then return in fifth year. We said 'No, if you do that, they won't be back.' And they did anyway and at the start of Fifth year they turned up and said they wanted to come back. And we said, 'No, you can repeat Transition Year if you like. But you can't come into Fifth year.'

Such an attitude will seem severe to some, especially when the majority of schools in the country have TY as an optional route to a LC. However, the view in Beech School was that in order to establish the idea of a six-year cycle to the LC, strong measures were called for at the outset. The coordinator continues:

> Now that was kind of harsh but actually it worked because that didn't happen the next year. Now you can say that we have three victims of this system, but without doing that I think it would have destroyed the whole thing.

Since then various students have spent the year immediately after the Junior Certificate in paid employment and the school continues to insist that if they wish to follow the established LC, they still have to take part in TY.

Specific issues

The first coordinator states that one of the difficulties with an innovation like TY is 'how to keep the momentum going'. She contrasts the effort required, for example, to get project work from TY students with the situation in the LCA, where there is 'an outside impetus – there is an examiner coming in'. This theme of getting students to deliver work, especially project work, on time and of good quality, emerges in the interviews with each of the coordinators.

In the early days of TY, many teachers remarked that the standard of project work was poor. The frustration of trying to engage students who seem poorly motivated for school with project work is palpable. One coordinator referred to some students 'who never open a schoolbag, in any year, from the time they go home from school to the time when they come back in here again in the morning'. Such an attitude, allied with erratic attendance and part-time jobs after school, makes sustaining the momentum needed for project work very difficult: 'You need nearly super-human energy and commitment to keep this going and follow it through again and again.'

Two other coordinators also emphasise the challenges of getting students to engage, not just with project work, but with school in general. For TY to work, they contend, goals have to be very clear, and maintaining the momentum can be energy sapping. The third coordinator is in little doubt that in a school designated

'disadvantaged' a committed coordinator is crucial: 'It must have someone who really believes in it and who drives it.'

The third coordinator has also observed a trend among TY students where limited initial engagement can give way to a more enthusiastic, interested disposition as the year develops: 'I think they respond very well (to TY) though I think they respond better towards the middle to latter part of the programme, than at the start.'

In response to poor attendance in TY, Beech School introduced an attendance rule. Students signed a contract stating that they would not miss more than 15 days in a school year. The first coordinator says that it did get the message across that the school was seriously concerned that the students come to school. However, when one or two actually missed more than 15 days and were put off the course, many staff members felt bad about it and wondered what, if anything, had been achieved for the students by this policy. Present practice is a combination of careful monitoring of attendance combined with persistent encouragement and cajoling. Commenting on this issue in 2006, the Principal adds that it is the view within the school that 'the operation of the Education Welfare Act (2000) has had no impact on this matter'.

Assessment during TY is regular and 'the form of assessment will depend on the teaching method being used but may also include end-of-term examinations'. Parents are informed on a regular basis regarding their children's progress.

The coordinators in Beech School see the assessment of learning as a problematic area for TY.

> I feel that the assessment area lets us down. The format of reports is poor. The evaluation process is not cross-curricular. I would prefer to see a more overall approach.
>
> Teacher 16, Beech School

Initially Beech School sent home three reports during the year. This was reduced to two when it became 'burdensome' on the staff. Most teachers use a form of continuous assessment based on class work and project work; exams are not ruled out but are not part of the formal structure. The first coordinator would like to see more specific reporting on particular skills, what has been developed and what needs attention, not just 'a nine or a ten', the meaning of which is unclear. When students come from families with limited positive experience of formal schooling, devising meaningful systems of assessment and reporting is especially difficult. The coordinators state that the school continues to search for appropriate forms of assessment and reporting to students and parents.

As a school designated 'disadvantaged', Beech School is in receipt of various additional supports. Despite this, one of the coordinators point to the difficulties of persisting with an extensive TY programme when neighbouring schools have either never offered it or have dropped it. He talks about a sense of isolation, stating:

> Schools are like little islands around here. School Y is only down there and we have virtually no relationship with them. We wouldn't hear much (about what goes on there). All the local schools have given it (TY) up. But I think there are enough people around here (Beech School) positive about it.

He expands on this, recalling the extensive work done by the staff at the time of TY's introduction into Beech School. Lots of hours were put into producing detailed documentation and the effect, he says, was to generate a strong sense of 'ownership' of TY among the teachers. Because of this investment of time, energy and their belief in TY, he believes that, despite the difficulties, the teachers in Beech School will continue with TY.

Funding

Almost inevitably, that impressive list of activities beyond the classroom raises questions of funding. Firstly, it is worth pointing out that some of these activities

do not incur additional costs. However, many do. The school's policy is to ask students to make a contribution to the transport costs (often public transport, i.e. 'pay your own bus fare'). Conscious of the economic situation of many of their students, the policy is to flag upcoming events and their likely cost well in advance so that students can save. The Principal feels strongly that schools designated 'disadvantaged', trying to offer TY, face particular challenges regarding funding. The school clearly values the educational possibilities in the activities mentioned above. At the time of the mainstreaming of TY in 1994 an additional £50 per students was allocated by the Department of Education. This allowance has never been updated and still stands at €63.50 per student. With inflation since 1994 it means that each year the amount buys less. In a sobering comment regarding this key aspect of TY, the Principal of Beech School remarks,

> This is a very limiting factor in our situation because £50 won't get you a whole lot. It is interesting to note that in a non-fee-paying school, not far from us, the TY 'voluntary contribution' for next year (06–07) is €450. Obviously, we try to supplement it by students paying extra for some of the things they are involved in but this is not desirable either. The other option available to some schools of fundraising/voluntary contribution doesn't apply here[1].

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[1] As noted elsewhere, on April 20th 2007, the Minister for Education announced an increase in the special student grant for TY to bring it to €100 per student.

Chestnut School

Chestnut School is an all-boys voluntary secondary school in a suburban location. Founded by a religious order of priests more than 50 years ago, Chestnut School defines its aim as: '… to enable each of its pupils to develop his personality and character through religious, academic, social, cultural and sporting activities'.

The school offered a four-year Intermediate Certificate until the late 1980s when it introduced a TY alongside the three-year Junior Certificate. Interviewed in 2002, the Principal indicated that from the outset the expectation within the Chestnut School community has been that students would continue right through to the Leaving Certificate and achieve well in that examination. A large number of students then transfer to third-level education. High levels of academic achievement are part of the school's tradition and a wide variety of sporting opportunities is available to students.

Introduction and development of TY in Chestnut School

The introduction of the Transition Year Option (TYO) in the late 1980s not only enabled the continuance of a six-year cycle for the majority of students but ensured that there was no reduction in the school's teaching staff. Staff members were keen to maintain academic standards and many saw TYO as an opportunity to build a solid platform for the LC. The TYO was also characterised by the addition of new modules such as European Studies and Environmental Studies as well as trips outside the conventional classroom.

After the 1994 mainstreaming of TY, Chestnut School changed its practice of asking students to select their optional subjects for LC at the start of TY; choices are now made towards the final stages of TY. The modular structure of the TY programme, the work experience programme and the general broadening effects

of various TY activities are all seen by the coordinators as contributing to students being clearer about their interests, abilities and motivations regarding subjects for the LC.

Initially, there was one TY coordinator in Chestnut School, but in 1998 it was decided to appoint a second person to make a two-person core team. Both coordinators volunteered for their positions in that TY duties are separate from their posts as assistant principals, under which heading they have other duties. Chestnut School does not have a written job description for TY coordination. Both coordinators state that they are happy with the flexibility that this arrangement offers, especially as they feel they have a clear understanding of who does what and they work well as a team. They both like the way the TY programme and tasks related to coordination have evolved since the programme began in Chestnut School. Each year they have worked together on consciously developing new dimensions of the programme, for example, systematically recording the year's activities on a digital camera one year, and setting up an education forum to hear parents' views the following year. They also reveal, in common with the TY coordinators interviewed in the other three schools, enormous commitment to the programme.

As regards writing the programme, the coordinators are tentative about making demands on their teaching colleagues. Before the publication of *Writing the Transition Year Programme* (TYCSS, 1999a), Chestnut School had devised a 12-point structure for individual teachers to write their module or subject. The coordinators express a tension between wanting to respect the professional autonomy of their colleagues while at the same time encouraging more active teaching and learning methodologies. What happens when the coordinators hear that some teachers are not engaging in active methods? The coordinators' responses reveal some of the delicate sensitivities around peer monitoring. Indeed, the tentative tone of their remarks serves to underline the fragile ground on which coordinators work. As one coordinator remarks:

> You probably won't get everybody. It's difficult, I suppose, to do anything about it, you know. How do you tell somebody to change? But I think that, if you take time within the, sort of, overall structure of the thing, I mean, for example, in Business Studies, they would, they would run a company. I know in Science, for example, they would do a lot more practical work than they would perhaps do in the other years.

Given the very strong emphasis throughout the school on the importance of LC classes, both coordinators acknowledge that some of their colleagues probably see them as 'well-meaning idealists', with their emphasis on personal and social development and on broadening students' experiences during TY.

The TY programme in Chestnut School has been altered and adjusted every year. This is partly informed by an annual evaluation, which involves the Principal circulating a questionnaire at the start of the third term each year. The questionnaire invites teachers to look at the overall impact of the year as well as at the modules that they have taught, e.g.
What were the strengths of the year?
What were the weaknesses?
What were the strengths and weaknesses in the subject you were teaching?
How would you improve it next year?

TY is taken by almost all students, though since the mid-1990s a small number of students, usually for reasons of age, have not followed the TY programme and proceeded directly to Fifth year after the JC. The Principal and the two joint coordinators stress that, while they believe strongly in the value of TY, there may be individual cases where the students will move straight into Fifth year.

Description of TY Programme at Chestnut School

The TY programme has three components: compulsory subjects, optional modules and additional modules.

TABLE 4.4 STRUCTURE OF TY IN CHESTNUT SCHOOL

Compulsory subjects	Optional subjects	Additional modules
Irish, English, Mathematics, Religion, Physical Education, one European language (German, French or Spanish), Guidance, Work Experience	Art, Craft and Design, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, History, Geography, Technical Graphics, Business (including mini-company), Accounting, Economics	Classical Studies, Drama, Education for Living, Environmental Studies, European Studies, Gender Studies (including Home Economics), Keyboarding and Information Technology, Music, Politics, Psychology, Spatial Studies

In what they refer to as 'core' subjects, such as English, Maths and Irish, the two coordinators emphasise the autonomy given to subject teachers. They ask each teacher to give them a broad outline of each subject programme, the aims and objectives, the content, and how it might be assessed.

All classes in TY, with the exception of Mathematics, are arranged on a mixed-ability basis. A modular approach to subjects such as English and Irish is a distinctive feature of the school's TY programme. This involves dividing the year into three ten-week periods. The Principal sees this as an excellent opportunity for teachers to specialise in particular areas and devise engaging modules. For example, in English, he cites Anglo-Irish literature, drama and media studies as examples. During the course of a year, teachers teach the same module to three different groups of students and so the students are exposed to a richer variety of teaching approaches.

This modular approach also means that teachers are making more informed decisions about the make-up of classes in Fifth year, especially as regards who takes a subject at honours level. Students who may have under-performed in the JC examination can demonstrate during TY that they will be able for demanding courses, according to the Principal. He believes that some pressure to continue to perform academically is needed in TY and he encourages a continual emphasis on maintaining high standards. He also believes that parents are reassured when students are kept busy.

The additional modules area is the one that allows for greatest flexibility. The two coordinators in Chestnut School report that they continually investigate details of programmes that appear to have worked well in other schools. They identify the workshops for TY coordinators, organised by the support service, as a particularly useful network for picking up fresh ideas. There is a large, dedicated TY office in Chestnut School where extensive files of modules and programmes have been carefully collected and catalogued.

Fresh thinking is also evident in the ongoing assessment operated during TY, using a 'Folders of Excellence' format, though the two coordinators would like to see the assessment of learning in TY 'tightened up'.

Timetable

The possibilities offered by dividing the school year into three distinct parts are well demonstrated by the timetable in Chestnut School. Teachers are timetabled in the normal way for a particular module or subject for the full school year, while students can change, for example, to sample Art, Geography and History for ten weeks each. At the same time, distinct modules in English and Irish run for ten weeks, with teachers developing their own specialisms. In classes like PE, RE and Maths, the option is there for both ten-week modules and whole-year programmes. This model of timetabling demonstrates how short ten-week courses and year-long ones can both be accommodated within one timetable. The arrangements for Business offer a further refinement of these possibilities. Here, one of the groups has two teachers allocated so that class numbers are halved for that particular module, in this case in order to facilitate mini-companies.

Thirty-four teachers are timetabled for TY classes, 13 of them for more than one subject, e.g. Business (mini-company) and Geography, Computer Studies and Art, Physical Education and History, Technical Drawing and Computer Studies or for more than one group. A typical student in Chestnut School would, in the course of

a week, have classroom contact with between 14 and 17 teachers. Throughout the year, the same typical student, with the rotation of ten-week blocks, could have classroom contact with 27 different teachers.

TABLE 4.5 COMBINED CLASS TIMETABLE FOR MODULE 1, CHESTNUT SCHOOL:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8.50	1 Business T1 2 Business T2 2 Business T3 3 Business T4	1 Irish T16 2 Environmental T20 3 Technical Drawing T21	1 Physical Ed. T6 2 Physical Ed. T7 3 Physical Ed. T8	1 French T9 2 French T10 3 German T 11 1 Spanish T12	1 Irish T16 2 Guidance T28 3 Science T20
9.30	1 Art T5 2 Geography T2 3 History T6	1 English T22 2 Environmental Studies T20 3 Technical Drawing T21	1 Irish T16 2 Irish T13 3 Irish T 17	1 Maths T13 2 Maths T14 3 Maths T15	Business T1 Business T2 Business T3 Business T4
10.10	1 Art T5 2 Geography T2 3 History T6	1 Maths T13 2 Maths T14 3 Maths T15	1 French T9 2 French T10 3 German T 11 1 Spanish T12	1 Guidance T28 2 English T22 3 Guidance T18	Business T1 Business T2 Business T3 Business T4
10.50	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK
11.00	1 Physical Ed. T6 2 Physical Ed. T7 3 Physical Ed. T8	1 Science T19 2 Science T18 3 English T16	1 Religious Ed. T23 2 Religious Ed. T24 3 Religious Ed. T25	1 Science T19 1 Science T29 2 Equality St. T26 2 Equality St. T30 3 English T16	1 Computer St. T33 1 Computer St. T24 2 Guidance T18 Technical Drawing T21
11.40	1 Physical Ed. T6 2 Physical Ed. T7 3 Physical Ed. T8	1 Art T5 2 Geography T2 3 History T6	1 English T22 2 English T27 3 English T16	1 Science T19 1 Science T29 2 Equality St. T26 2 Equality Studies T30 3 Science T20	1 Computer St. T33 1 Computer St. T24 2 Irish T13 Technical Drawing T21
12.20			1 Art T5 2 Geography T2 3 History T6		
13.00	LUNCH BREAK	LUNCH BREAK	LUNCH BREAK	LUNCH BREAK	LUNCH BREAK
13.20	1 French T9 2 French T10 3 German T 11 1 Spanish T12	1 Religious Ed. T23 2 Religious Ed. T24 3 Religious Ed. T25		1 Music T31 2 Science T18 3 Computer St. T32 3 Computer St. T21	1 English T22 2 English T27 3 Guidance T32
14.00	1 Maths T13 2 Maths T14 3 Maths T15	1 Religious Ed. T23 2 Religious Ed. T24 3 Religious Ed. T25		1 Music T31 2 Science T18 3 Computer St. T32 3.Computer St. T21	1 Spanish T 12 1 French T 9 2 French T 10 3 German T 11 3 German T34
14.40	1 Irish T16 2 Computer St. T5 2 Computer St. T18 3 Irish T17	1 Classics T26 2 Irish T13 3 Science T20		1 Business T1, 2 Business T2, 2 Business T3, 3 Business T4	1 Guidance T32 2 Science T18 3 Irish T17
15.20	1 Science T19	1 Classics T26		1 English T22	1 Maths T13

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| | 2 Computer St. T52 Computer St. T18 3 English T16 | 2 English T27 3 Science T20 | | 2 Irish T13 3 Irish T17 | 2 Maths T14 3 Maths T15 |

Colour Codes : Single period Double period Teacher teaches more than one subject

Benefits

The Principal sees the maturing effect of TY as its most obvious benefit. From his visits to schools in Denmark and Germany, where it is commonplace for school leavers to be 19 years of age, he is convinced that the transition type experience in school is much preferable to starting university at 16 or 17 years of age. He says it is quite obvious in relation to discipline issues in the school. He remarks:

> There is a maturity about them in Fourth year … Of course, in Fourth, Fifth and Sixth years there are the discipline dilemmas; you get inefficiencies: you get kids going in different directions and not knowing what they are up to; but you don't get particular discipline problems in Fourth, Fifth and Sixth years the way you get in Second and Third years.

The Principal adds that TY has had an important developmental impact across the teaching staff. He speaks enthusiastically about the openness of the TY coordinating team, their willingness to try innovations within the TY programme and their general commitment to improving the quality of students' experiences in the school. Their interest and energy has a positive ripple effect across the school, continually reminding colleagues about possibilities. TY is very heavily identified with the two coordinators, and the Principal sees them as highly respected by their colleagues.

Students' views

In the focus group discussions in Chestnut School, students' comments about school tend to be in terms of the LC, suggesting a dominant position of the examination in their consciousness. TY is described in contrast to the exam-focused, demanding work of Third, Fifth and Sixth years.

> I couldn't tell you now why I know, but isn't it strange how almost every student does know that Fourth year is going to be an easy year?
>
> Ciaran, Third year, Chestnut School.

> In exam years there is emphasis on exams and it's like 'revise, revise'. In Fourth year it's more relaxed and you get to try new things. You get to try out new subjects for Leaving Cert. and also you get to do projects, and the mini-company and the Irish communication course. I think it's good.
>
> > Eamonn, Fourth year, Chestnut School

> In Third year you are focusing on an exam. In Fourth year, I am not saying that you don't have to work – you have to work – but it's more relaxed and you can go off and do projects and stuff like films, the Young Scientist and it's just more relaxed.
>
> > Denis, Fourth year, Chestnut School

Those who dismiss TY as 'a waste' do so, invariably, because they cannot see a clear enough connection with LC achievement. One of the frequently voiced fears among Third year students is that while TY might be enjoyable, settling back into Fifth year – and what some call 'serious study'– might be problematic.

> I think Fourth year is a waste of time … you just go on trips and all of that and I wouldn't be really interested in them. I find it very hard to study as it is and if they gave me a year practically off I wouldn't be able to start studying in Fifth year and would probably fail (the LC) … I don't see the point.
>
> > Cormac, Third year, Chestnut School

> A friend … she took the year off basically, which was a doss year in her school, and she couldn't study when she went back to Fifth year and now she is dropping out.
>
> > Finn, Third year, Chestnut School

> It's just some people think TY is a resting period. They just believe it is a waste of time … For example, one person is working in a bar and he never comes in the next day after working and that kind of thing.
>
> > Liam, Fourth year, Chestnut School

For some, TY's value is that it can assist in clarifying both subject choice for LC and more long-term study and career planning.

> I think the TY is really for career guidance, to let you know what you will be doing when you are older. And it's a break before you go into your big exam, in Leaving Cert. So, it's a rest.

> You get to do all the new subjects before making choices for the Leaving Cert. So (TY) is good for that.
>
> Roy, Fifth year, Chestnut School

Others point to not wanting to be too young doing the LC or moving on to third-level. From Third year right through to Sixth year, students specifically identified TY as being especially important in enabling them to tackle the LC course in higher level Mathematics.

> One of the main things is doing honours Maths. Without doing TY it would be pretty tricky because you do the algebra and trigonometry which is the basis for all the other topics, so you would be totally lost otherwise.   Daragh, Sixth year, Chestnut School

> In Biology we are doing projects on our heart and our body but for Maths you have got fixed course work and you have to cover it or you are going to fail, and you can't debate it, you have to do it.
>
> Eamonn, Fourth year, Chestnut School

Activities that are different from those experienced in Junior Cycle, such as mini-companies, project work and field trips outside the school, are rated highly by many students. Indeed, in each senior group there were students who vividly recalled visits to events outside the school. Work experience and the satisfaction derived from completing challenging projects are mentioned frequently on students' lists of TY 'highlights'. As they recall their experiences, senior cycle students regularly reflect on 'how much I matured' during TY and, in many cases, how their parents said they 'grew up a bit' over the course of the year.

> In Fourth year we went on trips and then we had to do reports … It gave you more of a feel for your work.
>
> Bill, Fifth year, Chestnut School

> I think I am more mature. I now know what course I want to take when I get older, I am a lot clearer in my mind now about a career.

Particularly noteworthy among the students' comments is the perception that teachers were more relaxed in TY when compared to JC and, because of this, many students said that they got more time and space for discussion and for expressing their own opinions. Many valued this and saw it as one of the distinguishing features of TY. More active student participation in classroom was linked by many with what they saw as qualitatively different relationships between students and teachers during TY. As one student remarked:

> In Fourth year it (student–teacher relationship) is more of a level playing field. Each one has respect for the other. You can see that when we contribute ideas in class … I think some teachers prefer it that way and other teachers just don't want to know; they still want to treat you as the student/pupil.   Liam, TY student, Chestnut School

Students in Chestnut School report that their parents have very mixed views on TY, echoing observations made by the Principal. Those who reported that their parents were critical of the year tended to focus on perceptions of limited homework or the programme not being busy enough (too much time off).

> My mother thinks it was waste of time … She thinks there was a lot of free time and outings in the year. She saw my lack of homework, my lack of studying. My Mam thought there would be a lot of project work.   Eamonn, Fourth year, Chestnut School

Some Sixth year students in Chestnut School, interviewed within a month of their final examinations, expressed some disappointment about TY. For example:

> I thought the fact that we did too little work probably messes us a little bit for the Leaving Cert. … I have known for years what I wanted to do in college, so … I would have preferred to have gone straight through school and get to college and get out working as early as possible but I mean other than that is wasn't too bad. I just think there wasn't enough emphasis on work. Even the teachers themselves didn't take it too seriously as well as the students.
>
> Shane, Sixth year, Chestnut School

Some students wondered whether doing the LC twice would have been a more efficient use of their time. However, students were keen to point out how dedicated and focused their teachers are, especially with Sixth year students – 'they even take extra classes at lunchtime'.

Perhaps because of such commitments, they say, teachers are less inclined to take TY classes as seriously. This leads to the mention of specific exceptions – teachers whom they regarded as especially motivating and encouraging during TY. They contrast the mood and pace of TY with the start of Fifth year, recalling their shock at the 'loads of homework' during the first week of Fifth year.

> I remember the shock of the first week in Fifth year; suddenly there was loads of homework.　　Kieran, Sixth Year, Chestnut School

Asked what advice they might offer to the school about TY, one student reflected his classmates' views when he said:

> I think the basic thing is: if they want to do it (TY), they should take it seriously, and don't use students as guinea pigs. Get a syllabus together … before you actually start a TY programme. And don't turn such a blind eye to TY … because there was a bit of a blind eye taken to people just going home and things which you wouldn't get away with in Fifth or Sixth but you got away with a lot easier in Fourth year.　　　　　　　　　　　　Darragh, Sixth year, Chestnut School

Teachers' views

Of the four schools in this study, teachers' views on TY in Chestnut School are the most mixed. A majority of teachers agree with statements that 'TY gives students a broad educational experience'(97 per cent), 'advances students' maturity' (85 per cent) and 'technical skills' (71 per cent); 'that students are better equipped for a LC after TY'; 'that students who follow a TY programme achieve higher results in the Leaving Certificate than those who don't'; that the programme 'orientates students well to adult and working life'; and that 'students become more confident'.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 8 (a) TY gives students a broad educational experience	28	29%	68%	0%	0%	4%
Q. 8 (c) TY advances students' maturity	28	39%	46%	4%	0%	11%
Q. 11 (c) Students develop technical skills	28	7%	64%	11%	4%	14%
Q. 8 (d) Students are better equipped for a Leaving Certificate programme after a TY	28	25%	54%	7%	4%	11%
Q. 11 (f) Students who follow a TY programme achieve higher results in the Leaving Certificate that those who don't	27	19%	56%	7%	0%	18%
Q. 8 (e) TY orientates students well to adult and working life	28	11%	61%	4%	0%	25%
Q. 11 (a) Students become more confident	28	21%	68%	0%	0%	11%

> Maturity, more thought-out. Some experiences of the workplace. Skills for adult life plus good CV, keyboard skills, reflection and study interests.   Teacher 72, Chestnut School

A majority of teachers in Chestnut School view their programme as 'well thought-out', with 'breadth and balance', as presenting students and teachers with good opportunities for learning beyond the classroom and as well coordinated. Seventy-nine per cent agree that the school's written programme is very good. A majority also agree with the view that students become more socially aware, more socially competent and that TY helps students to clarify career goals. In Chestnut School, 89 per cent of those surveyed state that they like teaching TY classes and 82 per cent state that they like the freedom and flexibility that TY offers and using active teaching and learning methodologies.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 9 (a) Our programme is well thought-out	28	18%	57%	18%	0%	7%
Q. 9 (c) Our programme has breadth and balance	28	18%	57%	18%	0%	18%
Q. 9 (d) Our programme presents students and teachers with good opportunities for learning beyond the classroom	28	25%	57%	14%	0%	4%
Q. 16 (a) Our TY programme is well coordinated	28	21%	71%	7%	0%	0%
Q. 16 (c) Our written TY programme	28	25%	54%	11%	0%	11%

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
is very good						
Q. 11 (g) Students become more socially aware	27	15%	67%	7%	0%	11%
Q. 11 (i) Students become more socially competent	28	14%	57%	14%	0%	14%
Q. 11 (k) TY assists students clarify career goals	26	15%	58%	19%	0%	8%
Q. 15 (a) I like teaching Transition Year classes	28	21%	68%	0%	0%	11%
Q. 15 (d) I like the freedom and flexibility which TY offers	28	11%	71%	0%	0%	18%
Q. 15 (f) I like using active teaching and learning methodologies	28	7%	75%	4%	0%	14%

Well thought-out with breadth and balance thanks to the work of the coordinators. Some students are too immature to appreciate that at the time of TY.   Teacher 60, Chestnut School

Class sizes and complementary courses have been well thought-out and coordinated.   Teacher 74, Chestnut School

Well organised.   Teacher 61, Chestnut School

Confidence, higher LC results and more socially aware.

Teacher 60, Chestnut School

Chestnut School is the only one of the four schools where a majority of those surveyed (68 per cent) are of the view that teachers would prefer a three-year Leaving Certificate programme, though only 39 per cent of these teachers state that they would like this themselves.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 14 (g) Teachers would prefer a three-year Leaving Cert. programme	28	32%	36%	14%	4%	14%
Q. 15 (g) I would prefer a three-year Leaving Cert. programme	28	18%	21%	25%	11%	25%

In Chestnut School, a majority of teachers agree with the statement that teaching TY 'promotes the professional development of teachers'. There is also majority support for the ideas that teachers respond well to the freedom and flexibility to design relevant programmes, and that teachers develop skills in TY that enhance their teaching in other years. A majority is of the view that teachers find there is a

lack of resources for TY. Similarly, a majority would like more time for planning TY classes with colleagues and 88 per cent would like more in-service training. Seventy-three per cent of teachers disagree with the assertion that class sizes are too big.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 14 (a) Teaching TY promotes the professional development of teachers	28	14%	54%	21%	0%	11%
Q. 14 (c) Teachers respond well to the freedom and flexibility to design relevant programmes	28	7%	79%	11%	0%	4%
Q. 15 (d) Teachers develop skills in TY which enhance their teaching in other years	28	11%	64%	14%	0%	11%
Q. 14 (h) Teachers find that there is a lack of resources for TY	28	18%	54%	29%	0%	0%
Q. 15 (i) I would like more time for planning TY classes with colleagues	28	29%	46%	7%	4%	4%
Q. 15 (j) I would like more in-service training for TY	28	38%	50%	4%	0%	11%

Finance and resources are key issues for allowing innovative approaches.   Teacher 57, Chestnut School

No time or resources given for this teacher development.

Teacher 57, Chestnut School

Class sizes and complementary courses have been well thought-out and coordinated.   Teacher 74, Chestnut School

As regards assessment, a majority of teachers in Chestnut School agree that devising and implementing new forms of assessment is difficult. However, while a majority welcome the new and varied forms of assessment in TY, views are mixed as to whether the forms of assessment used in TY are appropriate.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 14 (i) Devising and operating new forms of assessment is difficult	27	26%	52%	18%	0%	4%
Q. 15 (e) I welcome the varied forms of assessment in TY	28	11%	64%	14%	4%	7%
Q. 9 (f) The assessment techniques used in TY are appropriate	28	7%	39%	29%	11%	14%

Teachers are asked to teach subjects without much help in preparing a course/assessment.   Teacher 75, Chestnut School.

A majority believe that parents of Third year students are well informed about TY and that parents are kept well informed about activities and events during TY.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 16 (b) Parents of Third year students are well informed about TY	28	21%	57%	11%	0%	11%
Q. 16 (d) Parents are kept well informed about activities and events during TY	28	21%	57%	18%	0%	4%

There is an obvious lack of agreement among teachers about whether the programme is well suited to students' needs, whether 'students develop well in the absence of examination pressure' (57 per cent agreement, 39 per cent disagreement), whether students develop academic skills or whether they become more independent learners through TY. Mixed views are also evident about whether the programme provides students with intellectual challenge, whether the school's approach to evaluation is progressive, whether students show little interest in TY, the status of the programme among students and teachers, whether students become more motivated and self-directed as learners, mixed-ability teaching, whether teachers would prefer a prescribed syllabus for their subjects, and whether TY promotes teamwork among teachers.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 9 (b) Our programme is well-tailored to our students' needs	28	7%	57%	21%	4%	11%
Q. 8 (b) Students develop well in the absence of examination pressure	28	21%	36%	32%	7%	4%
Q. 11 (d) Students develop academic skills	28	11%	43%	25%	11%	11%
Q. 8 (f) Students become more independent learners through TY	28	11%	43%	21%	4%	21%
Q. 9 (e) Our programme provides students with intellectual challenge	28	7%	54%	21%	4%	14%
Q. 9 (g) Our approach to evaluation is progressive	28	11%	46%	29%	4%	11%
Q. 11 (e) Students show little interest in TY	28	11%	39%	39%	4%	7%
Q. 11 (h) The TY programme has low status among students	28	14%	36%	43%	4%	0%
Q. 15 (f) The programme has a low status among teachers	28	7%	46%	39%	0%	7%
Q. 11 (j) Students become more	32	7%	41%	41%	0%	11%

motivated and self-directed as learners						
Q. 14 (b) Teachers find mixed-ability classes difficult	27	18%	52%	26%	0%	4%
Q. 15 (e) Teachers would prefer a prescribed syllabus for their subjects	27	11%	37%	22%	0%	30%
Q. 14 (j) TY promotes teamwork among teachers	27	7%	52%	33%	0%	7%

I feel the sudden absence of exam pressure leaves the goals of the year obscured and so difficult to re-establish.

Teacher 73, Chestnut School

Evaluation should be in May, not at the beginning of the academic year. Could be tightened.   Teacher 57, Chestnut School

Not all teachers are interested in teamwork or the promotion of the aims of TY. Some would prefer a more narrow academic focus.

Teacher 72, Chestnut School

I support it overall but would like more training and creativity.

Teacher 75, Chestnut School

Whereas some outstanding work is done it is very spotty. There is a tendency to fall back on traditional material and methods.

Teacher 67, Chestnut School

Difficult to offer a radical educational experience while constrained by school timetable.   Teacher 62, Chestnut School

Not seamless between Junior Cert. and Leaving Cert.; needs to be more inclusive, less disjointed.   Teacher 73, Chestnut School

Parents' views

The Principal says that feedback from parents about TY in Chestnut School covers a very wide spectrum of opinions. He remarks, 'Some parents say that it

(TY) is the worst thing that ever happened to their son, while others say it is wonderful, so you are left wondering at times.'

At the information evening for parents of Third year students, held in March every year, the coordinators present reasons for doing TY. They emphasise the maturing effects and the broad educational experiences on offer. They also highlight the research that indicates a strong correlation between doing a TY programme and attaining higher LC points. They draw attention to what they call the 'fun' dimension of learning, citing TY students' own feedback to support this emphasis.

One of the features of TY in Chestnut School is a formal, structured meeting between the coordinating team and parents. They refer to this as The Education Forum. Both TY coordinators think that parents are very keen to have the purposes of school policies explained to them. They state, for example, that parents seem keen to vary assessment of learning. One practical partnership between the school and parents that resulted from this forum was a programme of mock interviews, previously located in sixth year, but being seen as more relevant during TY.

During the student interviews, many made it clear that their parents had strongly held views on schooling. The majority stated that their parents had wanted them to do a six-year cycle from the outset. Some, particularly those in Sixth year, indicated that some parents were disappointed with what they perceived as a 'looseness' about TY. Too many 'free' classes and limited homework were cited as examples of this perception.

Specific issues

The Principal acknowledges that some teachers 'loved the three-year route to LC' and he sees some tension between the emphasis on TY as a 'stand-alone' programme and the reality of it being followed immediately by Fifth and Sixth years and terminating in a high-stakes examination. He is also frank that, in his

opinion, there are some teachers who don't like the structure of TY and so don't like teaching on the programme. As he sees it, 'There are some people who like teaching from the textbook, page 1 to page 57 … by their nature they are very structured and therefore inflexible.'

Hence, when it comes to timetabling teachers for TY classes the Principal of Chestnut School consults his staff, adding:

> In some cases we may say, 'If you don't want to do TY, it's not a problem.' Someone who has just finished teaching a Third year or a Sixth year class can take a First year or a Fifth year the next year.

This means that, in practice, those teaching TY are mainly teachers who really want to be teaching at that level in that way, he adds.

The Principal expresses concern that those who move from Third year directly into Fifth year may 'die academically' without the foundational experience of a TY that the rest of the class has. Because the majority in a Fifth year class have been through TY together they have matured and are well focused on studying for the LC. He says that during Fifth year some of those who have come straight from Third year express regret at their decision, asking if they can go back to TY, or may even decide to leave school altogether. Because of this he sometimes thinks that a change of school might be a better decision for those who don't want to do TY, though adds that no school likes to be losing students.

The two coordinators also identify those students who do not wish to do TY as presenting many challenges. As one of the coordinators remarks

> Often the ones who don't want to do TY want to fly through and get out of school as quickly as possible, because they see school as a bit of a nuisance and they just want to get out. Very often weak students tend to want the fast, fast lane out of it. They see Transition Year as not being particularly applicable to them.

The change from making LC subject choices at the end of TY rather than before is not universally welcomed. One of the coordinators points out a downside of the

modular, sampling approach, namely, the student who is very clear that he is not interested in a particular module. This coordinator cites the example of trying to converse with teachers who find themselves in such situations:

> I'm trying to encourage more experiential stuff. It's very hard to argue against somebody who'll say to me, 'This guy is not interested. He has made up his mind he is not doing this subject (for LC). So what is his purpose sitting in my class for 8 weeks as a nuisance, as a disruptive factor?' We counter that is by asking, 'What methods, or what different techniques, have you brought in to engage this student?' … Of course, some would be happy going back to when they made the choice of subjects in Third year.

The coordinators' view is that when modules are seen solely in terms of sampling for LC, they are doomed to failure. This is especially true during the final third of the year when many choices have already been made. Teaching subjects for their intrinsic value is very challenging, they add. As one of the coordinators states:

> I think this is an area that is always going to be problematic. There are teachers who see their role primarily as … producing students to do the public exams.

These coordinators also point out that the students themselves will also question the value of studying a module in TY when they know they will not be taking it on at LC level. The coordinators monitor attendance as an important indicator of students' engagement with modules. They notice some drop in attendance patterns towards the end of TY each year.

Funding

In 2003 parents were invited to pay a voluntary subscription of €250; approximately 70 per cent did so. There was an additional charge of €60 for TY. This money is spent mainly on typing and keyboard training and on some materials for Home Economics. There is an additional charge of €30 per student for the adventure activity in TY and another €30 for the First Aid course.

Sycamore School

Sycamore School is a community school developed in the early 1990s on the site of a former voluntary secondary school. According to the school's mission statement, Sycamore School 'provides an educational setting in which the person is encouraged to grow at every level – personally, academically, spiritually and culturally'. Students come from predominantly rural, agricultural backgrounds. A co-educational school, Sycamore School had an enrolment of over 600 students in 2004, drawn from about different 18 primary schools. TY in Sycamore School is voluntary.

Introduction and development of TY in Sycamore School

The decision to engage with TY was initially discussed by the advisory Board of Studies in 1994. This eight-person committee is elected by staff and meets on a monthly basis. The decision was to 'run with it', but there were reservations. According to the Principal:

> There was a lot of feeling against it, that it was going to be a 'doss year' … We went down the line of making it as academic as possible in the sense that we would gear it to students who had high ambitions, who were young, and who weren't sure of their subject options or their career choices at 15 years of age or 16; they would be encouraged to take the TY. And we would make it as academic as possible in the sense that the Irish, English and Maths we would break down into pass and honours and we would concentrate on the languages, especially the oral parts.

The Principal says that they didn't have all the structures they would have liked to operate the first TY and that there 'was so much going on at that time', but that he believes this is where leadership comes in: 'We decided to go for it, because that's the kind of staff we have; that's the type of guy I am: if I see something good, if I think it's good for the students, then go for it.'

For the first TY there were about 45 students, about 40 per cent of the cohort. This percentage has remained fairly constant in Sycamore School. Two class groups usually emerge from a cohort of about 120 completing the Junior Certificate.

Even though classes at junior cycle in Sycamore School are arranged on a mixed-ability basis, ability-based grouping operates in the core subjects in TY, reflecting the academic emphasis the school wished to give TY from the outset.

Initially, teachers were given autonomy to shape their own courses:

> Back in '94 we gave them very, very basic guidelines. The Deputy Principal and myself decided on the core elements of the programme, in the sense that we had an Engineering module, a Home Economics module, a Sports module and English, Irish, Maths, Geography, those types of modules. And we left it more or less to the individual teacher to draft up the actual course content.

During 1996, the staff devoted an in-service day to drawing up a specific core element for each subject. This was drawn up by subject departments and the idea was that no matter who was teaching the subject, this material was to be covered. The Principal recalls that when they initially looked for volunteers to teach TY, only two or three came forward. Consequently, teachers were allocated to teach the programme on an availability basis.

Looking back on the school's experience of TY, the Principal was emphatic that TY has to be taken seriously. He rates project work very highly. 'Learning how to work and research on one's own is a great skill for life', he adds. He states that the ability to monitor students' project work closely is an important consideration when allocating teachers to the programme. If a teacher gives out project work and then waits for, say, six weeks to see what students have done, the Principal believes very little work will result. He says that some teachers don't put as much emphasis on correcting TY students' work as they would for an honours Leaving Certificate class and so he would like to see more continuous assessment in TY. The Principal adds that he has become a great believer in the Leaving Certificate

Vocational Programme (LCVP) since its introduction into Sycamore School. He favours particularly its value 'as an eight subject' in the LC.

He also sees age as an important consideration for those considering TY. He points out that in the area served by the school there is a strong tradition of starting children in primary school at four years of age. One consequence is that many are only 17 years old when sitting the LC exam. He adds:

> The way I sold the TY to the parents is: they are too young to go and do the Leaving Cert.; they need a 2 ½ year Leaving Cert. … The NCCA document *(Developing Senior Cycle Education, Consultative Paper on Issues and Options,* NCCA, 2002) seems to be moving in that direction.

TABLE 4.6 RECENT DATA RELATING TO PARTICIPATION IN TY IN SYCAMORE SCHOOL:

Year	Number of students sitting JC examination	Number opting for TY
2000	104	40
2001	112	37
2002	121	37
2003	127	37
2004	130	48
2005	118	46
2006	134	38

The Principal says that while a strong academic emphasis is a feature of the school's programme, the classroom atmosphere in Fourth year is relaxed. He emphasises the opportunity for students to explore their potential and lay solid foundations for LC:

> I think the students would see themselves as testing themselves. Am I able for honours English? Am I able for honours Maths? And at the end of TY they'd either opt for honours Maths or be a very good pass student.

So far, he says, this has not led to difficulties in Fifth year classes, where teachers are faced with some students who have come straight from Third year while others have been through a TY with a strong academic emphasis. 'I don't think

(it's an issue). The people doing TY are honours standard material in most cases and then they really love going back over things a second time.'

Asked if the academic emphasis means that teachers are inclined to stay with a traditional academic approach, the Principal points to a number of in-service days related to teaching and learning and says that he has been impressed by teachers' openness to change. He cites the use of technology, particularly Web design work, field trips in Geography and mini-companies as examples of more active learning in action.

Since its introduction, Sycamore School has had three different TY coordinators. The Principal sees the ideal coordinator as someone who is a good communicator, someone who can relate effectively to teachers, students and parents. He says that each coordinator brings his or her own particular emphasis. For example, he praised the office holder who had been four years in the position at the time of the interview, for bringing a distinct career focus to Transition Year.

This coordinator had previously taught various TY classes, all with a practical slant. He is a teacher of woodwork and social studies who has also been involved in teaching mini-company in TY. He contends that getting the balance between 'pressure' and 'relaxation' is difficult. He values the more relaxed approach to TY compared to other years as this is appropriate for a programme dedicated to personal and social development. He captures one of the dilemmas of TY when he remarks, '(Students) need time to reflect on school in general and they won't do that in the pressurised situation.'

Description of TY Programme at Sycamore School

Over 40 teachers are involved in the TY programme in Sycamore School. In presenting the programme to parents in 2003, the school listed the following features:
1.   More informed decisions regarding career
2.   Allows student to mature

3.   Allows students to prepare for working life (this included an invitation to parents to become involved in the provision of work experience, work shadowing or 'any other initiative you might have')

4.   Broaden their outlook on life (school trips, theatre, museum, Newgrange and one major European trip were mentioned)

5.   'Catch up' on core subjects

6.   TY programmes – the list included the following:

Chemistry	Irish	English	French	German	Business Studies
Accounting	Maths	Physics	History	Geography	Art
Communications	Religion	Computers	Music	Mini-company	Keyboard skills
Personal Development	Careers	First Aid	Swimming	GAA Coaching	

As TY has developed, learning activities beyond the classroom, such as swimming, football, First Aid, tennis, excursions to third-level colleges as well as trips to other parts of Ireland and abroad, have become central to Sycamore School's TY. According to the TY coordinator:

> Yes, it's a big thing now. I would go as far as saying that if you didn't have a trip you wouldn't have a TY. I suppose it's kind of a group thing; they like going off together as a group.

Many of these more innovative activities are timetabled for Wednesdays and it was clear from the student interviews that they see this day as a distinctly TY one.

Timetable

As has been noted in the other school profiles, a school's weekly timetable is a key manifestation of its vision for the TY programme. The timetable in Sycamore School is a good example of a mix of timetabling strategies. The coordinator meets all TY students each morning for a ten-minutes assembly. The presence of two class groups is used to divide some parts of the TY programme into half-year modules. This can be especially effective when it comes to sampling LC subjects, e.g. History/Geography, Chemistry/Physics, French/German, Art/Home

Economics, Music/Business Studies. An extra provision of Learning Support classes for selected students is offered parallel to the French/German modules.

TABLE 4.7 TIMETABLE IN SYCAMORE SCHOOL

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8.50	Assembly T1*	Assembly T1	Assembly T1	Assembly T1	Assembly T1
9.00	TY1 Accounting T2 TY2 Technology T1	TY1 GeographyT3 TY2 History T4	TY1 English T19 TY2 Computer Studies T20	TY1 Mathematics T17 TY2 Mathematics T18	TY1 English T19 TY2 English T6
9.40	TY1 Accounting T2 TY2 Technology T1	TY1 Computer Studies T5 TY2 English T6	TY1 Art T21 TY2 Home Economics T22	TY1 French T13 TY2 German T14 Learning Supp T15	TY1 Irish T9 TY2 Irish T10
10.20	TY1 Geography T3 TY2 History T4	TY1 French T13 TY2German T 14 Learning Support T15	TY1 French T13 TY2 German T14 OR * EXEN T15	TY1 Religious Education T24 TY2 Keyboard Skills T25	TY1 SPHE** T28 TY2 Religious Education T24
11.00	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK
11.10	TY1 Computer Studies T5 TY2 English T6	TY1 Communications T6 TY2 Communications T16	TY1 Geography T3 TY2 History T4	TY1 Music T7 TY2 Business Studies T8	TY1 Art T21 TY2 Home Economics T22
11.50	TY1 Computer Studies T5 TY2 English T6	TY1 Communications TY2 Communications T16	TY1 Mathematics T17 TY2 Mathematics T18	TY1 Irish T9 TY2 Irish T10	TY1 Music T7 TY2 Business Studies T8
12.30	TY1 Music T7 TY2 Business Studies T8	TY1 Mathematics T17 TY2 Mathematics T18	TY1 Accounting T2 TY2 Technology T1	TY1 Career Guidance T1 TY2 SPHE** T26	TY1 Keyboard Skills T25 TY2 Environmental Studies T29
13.10	LUNCH BREAK	LUNCH BREAK	LUNCH BREAK	LUNCH BREAK	LUNCH BREAK
14.00	TY1 Irish T9 TY2 Irish T10	TY1 Chemistry T11 TY2 Physics T12	TY1+2 Physical Education T23	TY1 English T19 TY2 Computer Studies T20	TY1 French T13 TY2 German T14
14.40	TY1 Chemistry	TY1 Irish T9 TY2 Irish T10	TY1+2 Physical	TY1 Mathematics	

	T11 TY2 Physics T12		Education T23	T17 TY2 Mathematics 18	
15.20	TY1 Chemistry T11 TY2 Physics T12	TY1 English T19 TY2 Computer Studies T20	TY1+2 Physical Education T23	TY1 Environmental Studies T27 TY2 Career Guidance T1	

Colour Codes : Single period Double period Triple period Teacher teaches more than one subject

- Ten-minute daily meeting with TY coordinator

- ** SPHE = Social, Personal and Heath Education

Courses for many other parts of the programme run for the full year with a particular mixed-ability class group, e.g. English, Computer Studies, SPHE, Environmental Studies, Career Guidance, etc. Irish and Mathematics classes are grouped together on an ability basis and run for the full year. As already indicated, a triple period on Wednesdays is devoted to a range of activities timetabled as Physical Education. Within the TY programme, 29 different teachers are timetabled and a typical student is likely to be taught by about 19 teachers.

Benefits

Sycamore School operates a prefect system in Sixth year. Every year, the vast majority of those selected are past TY students. The Principal sees this as the fruit of the investment teachers make in TY and believes that TY contributes not only to the senior cycle but to the life of the school in general.

> They (TY students) would be better known to the teachers. Other students in the school look up to them. When they go into Fifth year and on into the Leaving Cert. year they are good workers, they are very nice and easy to get on with, they have a nice easy disposition, and they are respected.

This Principal believes that a direct benefit of TY in Sycamore School can be seen in Leaving Certificate results: 'I think it has pushed up our results. There is no question but it has increased our Leaving Cert. results.'

He sees this operating at a number of levels. Obviously the students are older and more mature. The struggle to stay with an honours course is not as great when students do TY. Those who do, say, ordinary level Maths are more likely to get As and Bs than Cs and Ds. Increased language fluency is evident in subjects like French and Irish. It also boosts their confidence. A culture of achievement builds up. Those who have done TY set an example to others and the achievement level of everybody in the class is, according to the Principal, raised.

The coordinator sees the opportunity for students to sample LC subjects as a very beneficial feature of TY. For him a major benefit arises from the time students have to clarify personal goals and career options. He also appreciates the opportunities presented by TY for teachers to be imaginative and inventive.

As already indicated, the Principal in Sycamore School has a strong belief in the power of project work. Among the benefits of this he sees greater independent learning and academic self-confidence.

The coordinator identifies improved relationships between students as a further benefit of TY. He describes the TY group as 'small and intimate', adding that trips outside the school seem to have a strong bonding impact, with students developing strong friendships with the group.

Students' views

Students in Sycamore articulate a broad range of opinions about TY. These are very evident in the chapter on student views.

> My brother had done it and when he came into Fifth year he woke up a bit as he had done nothing for the year so he said to me, 'Don't do it, there is no point.' And I didn't do it.
>
> Olive, Sixth year, Sycamore School

> Yeah, my sister did TY, and she kind of told me that it wasn't that good. She thought it was a waste of a year. But I didn't care what she said. I said I was going to do it anyway. So!
>
> Breda, Third year, Sycamore School

Third year students in Sycamore school tend to emphasise the break from what they see as the pressure of the Junior Certificate and its contrast with the rest of the school cycle. For example:

> It's, like, a break after Third year … It's fun. It's not as boring as the rest of the years.   Orlagh, Third year, Sycamore School

It's a year in-between. It's different from all the other years. It's a year you do different subjects you have not done before and you get to know the teachers better, and the teachers respect you a bit better. There is an awful lot of projects, and study.

> Eamonn, Third year, Sycamore School

You get a chance to calm down for the year and you get to think about your career, more than having to do subjects all the time.

> Leslie, Fourth year, Sycamore School

TY students themselves speak highly of the programme, in particular the bonds established between each other, the improved relationships with teachers, the opportunities for subject sampling and career exploration, for language improvement in key subjects, the trips abroad and the trips to centres like universities and Institutes of Technology. Work experience and mini-company are seen as especially engaging and worthwhile.

> Friendship was one very interesting thing. I am very close with everyone who did TY.　　Kenneth, Sixth Year, Sycamore School

> (in TY) you become comfortable with the group … in the classroom … through discussions or debates on … certain topics.

> Tiernan, Sixth year, Sycamore School

> I can remember ourselves in Irish class, we read a bit of the novel that had nothing to do with the Leaving Cert. course and we enjoyed it and the teacher had a more relaxed attitude as well.

> Tiernan, Sixth year, Sycamore School

> Last year the teachers never stopped talking about the Junior Cert. and there is none of that this year. They never mention anything about exams. It's just where you are going or different things you are doing during the week.　　Thomas, Fourth year, Sycamore School

> I didn't have any idea about my career, so I decided TY would help me there.　　Thomas, Fourth year, Sycamore School

> In Irish we got to do a lot of oral work, and I thought that was good.
>
> Peter, Fifth year, Sycamore School

> (In mini-company) everything in the world isn't as easy as it looks anyway, and you know you have to put an awful lot of effort to get something out of it, out of what you want to get, like, our ideas went straight down the swallow, so I think I learned a lot from that.
>
> Mark, Fifth year, Sycamore School

Fifth and Sixth year students contribute a rich variety of comments and insights. Their comments resonate strongly with the perspectives articulated by Fourth year students. Some tend to distinguish more sharply between the experiences in some TY classes (activity-based, democratic, with lots of discussion) and others (more traditional approaches, textbooks and 'teacher talk'). Some voice a concern that perhaps the potential of TY was not as well realised as it might have been, particularly within classrooms where, in the opinion of some, teachers tended towards more traditional teaching methods.

> Looking back I think they (teachers) could have done a lot more diverse things. They didn't have to teach in traditional methods. They could have done a lot of group work. In Irish communications … there was always discussion, discussion, discussion. At the start of the year she was getting us to play games together, to bond and come out of our shells. At the time I didn't like the class but, thinking back on it now, it was a great benefit.   Kathy, Sixth year, Sycamore School

Students say that, compared to other years, teachers are not as strict on homework in TY. They suggest more trips or even a greater spread of the trips throughout the year. Some would like more time devoted to learning outside the classroom, particularly Physical Education. Some students mentioned that TY, especially the trips, adds a big extra cost for families. For example, talking about a four-day trip to Paris one student remarked:

> €520, yes, and that's not all, you need spending money after that.
>
> Tara, Fourth year, Sycamore School

Teachers' views

In Sycamore School the teachers are unanimous that TY orientates students well to adult and working life, that students become more confident and that TY assists students clarify career goals.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 8 (e) TY orientates students well to adult and working life	15	13%	87%	0%	0%	0%
Q. 11 (a) Students become more confident	15	33%	67%	0%	0%	0%
Q. 11 (k) TY assists students clarify career goals	12	20%	80%	0%	0%	0%

> The maturing process – helping students make proper subject choices for their Leaving Certificate – the whole experience, i.e. travel, interpersonal skills, confidence building, leadership skills, presentation skills … Has created students who are more aware/confident and mature. They stand out among the students who have not taken this option. Teacher 53, Sycamore School

> Time to reflect on career choice; chance to explore strengths/weaknesses and aptitudes. Teacher 109, Sycamore School

A majority agrees with the statements that TY gives students a broad educational experience, that students develop well in the absence of examination pressure and that TY advances students' maturity. There is also majority agreement that 'students are better equipped for a Leaving Certificate programme after a TY'. A majority agree with the statement that their school's programme is well thought-out and well-tailored to students' needs. There is also strong support for statements such as 'students' thinking and problem-solving skills are enhanced through TY' (94 per cent), 'students develop technical skills' (73 per cent), 'students develop academic skills' (67 per cent), 'students become more socially aware' (66 per cent), and 'students become more socially competent' (86 per cent).

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 8 (a) TY gives students a broad educational experience	15	60%	33%	7%	0%	0%
Q.8 (b) Students develop well in the absence of examination pressure	15	13%	60%	27%	0%	0%
Q.8 (c) TY advances students' maturity	15	33%	53%	7%	0%	7%
Q.8 (d) Students are better equipped for a Leaving Certificate programme after a TY	15	33%	60%	0%	0%	7%
Q. 9 (a) Our programme is well thought-out	15	13%	53%	20%	0%	13%
Q. 9 (b) Our programme is well-tailored to our students' needs	15	13%	47%	27%	0%	13%
Q. 11 (b) Students' thinking and problem-solving skills are enhanced through TY	18	50%	44%	0%	0%	6%
Q. 11 (c) Students develop technical skills	15	20%	53%	13%	0%	7%
Q. 11 (d) Students develop academic skills	15	7%	60%	33%	0%	0%
Q. 11 (g) Students become more socially aware	15	13%	53%	27%	0%	7%
Q. 11 (i) Students become more socially competent	15	13%	73%	7%	0%	7%

Sixty-seven per cent of the teachers who completed the questionnaire indicated that they like teaching TY classes. Eighty per cent agreed with the statement that 'teachers respond well to the freedom and flexibility to design relevant programmes', 67 per cent with 'teachers develop skills in TY which enhance their teaching in other years' and 60 per cent with 'teaching TY promotes the professional development of teachers'. This enthusiasm for the creative possibilities in TY appears to be consistent with the 60 per cent who disagree with the statement 'I would prefer a prescribed syllabus for my subject', though only 53 per cent agree that 'teaching TY has helped my development as a teacher'.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 15 (a) I like teaching Transition Year classes	15	20%	47%	13%	0%	20%
Q. 14 (c) Teachers respond well to the freedom and flexibility to design relevant programmes	15	13%	67%	13%	0%	7%
Q. 15 (d) Teachers develop skills in TY which enhance their teaching in	15	20%	47%	13%	0%	20%

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
other years						
Q. 14 (a) Teaching TY promotes the professional development of teachers	15	0%	60%	27%	0%	13%
Q. 15 (b) I would prefer a prescribed syllabus for my subject	15	20%	13%	53%	7%	7%
Q. 15 (h) Teaching TY has helped my development as a teacher	15	20%	33%	20%	0%	27%

The responses suggest that Sycamore School might be the site for some lively debate among teachers regarding teaching mixed-ability classes, as 33 per cent agree that 'teachers find mixed-ability classes difficult', while 47 per cent disagree. Furthermore, 60 per cent agree that they like teaching mixed-ability classes, 80 per cent agree with the statement 'I like using active teaching and learning methodologies', and most agree that students become more independent learners through TY.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 14 (b) Teachers find mixed-ability classes difficult	15	0%	33%	40%	7%	20%
Q. 15 (c) I like teaching mixed-ability classes	15	20%	40%	20%	0%	20%
Q. 15 (f) I like using active teaching and learning methodologies	15	27%	53%	7%	0%	13%
Q. 8 (f) Students become more independent learners through TY	15	13%	67%	0%	7%	13%

Sixty per cent of the teachers in Sycamore School disagree with the statements that 'students show little interest in TY' and that 'the TY programme has low status among students'.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 11 (e) Students show little interest in TY	15	0%	27%	47%	13%	13%
Q. 11 (h) The TY programme has low status among students	15	7%	27%	47%	13%	7%

Alongside strong levels of agreement, many of the statements in Sycamore School attract consistent disagreement from about a quarter of the teachers. A telling indicator is that while 54 per cent of teachers believe that TY has a low status among teachers, 33 per cent disagree with such an assertion.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 15 (f) The programme has a low status among teachers	15	7%	47%	20%	13%	13%

Sixty per cent of teachers agree with the statement that students who follow a TY programme achieve higher results in the Leaving Certificate than those who don't; 40 per cent disagree with the statement that teachers would prefer a three-year Leaving Cert. programme, and a surprising 40 per cent ticked the 'no opinion' box in this instance. When asked a similar question about themselves as individual teachers, 60 per cent disagreed with the statement 'I would prefer a three-year Leaving Certificate programme', 13 per cent agreed with it and 27 per cent ticked the 'no opinion' box. As regards a prescribed syllabus for their subjects, again there is evidence of diverging viewpoints, with 40 per cent agreeing and 54 per cent disagreeing.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 11 (f) Students who follow a TY programme achieve higher results in the Leaving Certificate that those who don't	15	13%	47%	20%	7%	13%
Q. 14 (g) Teachers would prefer a three-year Leaving Cert. programme	15	0%	20%	27%	13%	40%
Q.15 (g) I would prefer a three-year Leaving Certificate programme	15	0%	13%	47%	13%	27%
Q.15 (e) Teachers would prefer a prescribed syllabus for their subjects	15	20%	20%	47%	7%	7%

Seventy-three per cent of the teachers in Sycamore School regard their programme as having breadth and balance. However, one teacher stated that while 'initially the programme was well thought-out' it was 'now due for review' (Teacher 107). Seventy-three per cent of teachers regarded the programme as presenting students and teachers with good opportunities for learning beyond the classroom. The question of whether TY provides students with intellectual challenge is one of the most contested ones in Sycamore School, with 46 per cent agreement, 33 per cent disagreement and 20 per cent opting to express no opinion.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 9 (c) Our programme has breadth and balance	15	20%	53%	13%	0%	13%
Q. 9 (d) Our programme presents students and teachers with good opportunities for learning beyond the classroom	15	13%	60%	7%	7%	13%
Q. 9 (e) Our programme provides	15	13%	33%	33%	0%	20%

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
students with intellectual challenge						

Differing viewpoints emerge in relation to whether 'students become more motivated and self-directed as learners'. Fifty-four per cent agree with this statement, while 27 per cent disagree and another 20 per cent opt to express 'no opinion.' Eighty per cent disagree that 'class sizes are too big'.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 11 (j) Students become more motivated and self-directed as learners	15	7%	47%	27%	0%	20%

Sixty per cent agree with the statement that teachers find that there is a lack of resources for TY. At the same time, another 60 per cent are of the view that TY promotes teamwork among teachers.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 14 (h) Teachers find that there is a lack of resources for TY	15	7%	53%	20%	7%	13%
Q. 14 (j) TY promotes teamwork among teachers	15	7%	53%	20%	0%	20%

Divided opinions, though not as stark, are also evident in relation to assessment. Sixty-seven per cent regard the assessment techniques used in TY as appropriate, with 20 per cent expressing disagreement and 7 per cent 'no opinion'. Sixty per cent agree that 'devising and operating new forms of assessment is difficult'. Perhaps significantly, 80 per cent of Sycamore School respondents indicate that they welcome the varied forms of assessment in TY, though one of the additional comments was, 'Our assessment techniques need to improve' (Teacher 110).

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 9 (f) The assessment techniques used in TY are appropriate	15	7%	60%	20%	0%	7%
Q. 14 (i) Devising and operating new forms of assessment is difficult	15	0%	60%	27%	7%	7%
Q. 15 (e) I welcome the varied forms of assessment in TY	15	20%	60%	0%	0%	20%

Mixed views among the teachers in Sycamore School are also evident as regards evaluating the school's TY programme. Forty per cent agree that their approach is progressive, while 40 per cent disagree, with 20 per cent ticking the box for 'no opinion'. One of the teachers (107) added a comment that an annual review is needed.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 9 (g) Our approach to evaluation is progressive	15	7%	33%	40%	0%	20%

Looking ahead, 73 per cent of the teachers in Sycamore School agree that 'I would like more time for planning TY classes with colleagues' and 66 per cent would like more in-service training for TY.

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q. 15 (i) I would like more time for planning TY classes with colleagues	15	13%	60%	7%	7%	13%
Q. 15 (j) I would like more in-service training for TY	15	33%	33%	7%	7%	20%

Parents' views

As already indicated, the Principal in Sycamore School sees parental resistance to TY as the main reason why there are only two TY class groups. The possibility of dropping out of school before the LC is seen as the main fear.

Sixty-six per cent of teachers agree with the statement that 'parents of Third year students are well informed about TY', while 67 per cent agree that 'parents are kept well informed about activities and events during TY'.

Q. 16 (b) Parents of Third year students are well informed about TY	15	33%	33%	20%	0%	13%
Q. 16 (d) Parents are kept well informed about activities and events during TY	15	27%	40%	13%	0%	20%

The coordinator is of the opinion that parents in Sycamore School, whom he describes as 'good conscientious parents who make their kids do TY in the first place', have not a great record of turning up to parent–teacher meetings – less than

50 per cent. He thinks that quite a few parents see TY 'as kind of on the margins'. This attitude, he adds, is passed on to students.

Specific issues

It can be difficult to get some students to opt for TY in Sycamore School. The Principal notes that student and parental attitudes together can generate strong resistance to the extra year in school. He points out, for example, that:

> … if one person who is a dominant character in a class decides to do it, they pull a good few with them. But, equally, if such students decide they are not going to do it, they would take a large chunk with them … Parents in rural Ireland, I would say, have to be convinced. They have a question mark over it. We brought in parents to 'sell' it, and we still didn't increase the numbers. We brought in past pupils that actually did the TY and that didn't sell it. It's the fear; number one, the fear that the young boy or girl won't stay in school if they do TY; that they will be bored with it; that they'll go along and do half of Fifth year or maybe not start off Leaving Cert. year. And we had experience of that.

Students also acknowledge the influence of their peers:

> I wouldn't do TY unless a couple of good friends did it. You are there on your own. You wouldn't know many people.
>
> Orlagh, Third year, Sycamore School

> … everyone I hang around with who doesn't want to do TY, their justification is that they just want to be out of here as fast as they can. They don't want to spend another year.
>
> Kevin, Third year, Sycamore School

With a view to increasing the numbers in TY, the Principal was planning to introduce the TY option to Second year students:

> We have decided that we will start next year with the present Second years before they leave Second year. During different talks with parents, even when enrolling, I mention TY, that they are going to have to look at this six-year cycle because to do the Leaving Cert. at 17 they are competing against students taking the Leaving at 19 and 20 and they have to be aware of that. But we don't really do anything else about it until three weeks before they have to make their decisions

> … Even if we went to the Third years last September, we would have probably had low figures.

Teachers in Sycamore School generally indicate a positive view of the TY programme, though a number emphasise that for some students a direct move from Third to Fifth year is desirable.

> Some students would do better to follow through immediately to the LC programme …   Teacher 103, Sycamore School

> About 20 per cent of students do not become self-directed or clarify career goals.   Teacher 110, Sycamore School

The coordinator feels that attitudes to TY may be too relaxed. Teachers who are very focused on academic achievements may not always value activities primarily designed to promote personal and social development. The coordinator's feeling that TY is pushed a little to the margins in Sycamore School reflects some of the tensions between a programme with a focus on personal development sandwiched between public examinations that are perceived as 'academic'. He explains:

> In our involvement with TY I am not sure if we are a pure TY, in that we do keep a lot of the academic subjects on board … Maybe we are afraid of it more so than anything; we are afraid to bring in something that is completely off the strict 'forty minute subject'. Now I feel it is working pretty well from the Leaving Cert. point of view. If nothing else they seem to be more mature. We hear scare stories from other schools where people have lost the study element completely. So you can understand why we stick to the tried and tested timetable system. But sometimes I feel that students might benefit more from a more workforce type environment.

Invited to expand of how 'being pushed to the margins' might manifest itself in practice, he cites the school policy regarding homework, where students who don't deliver homework are pursued. This does not happen in TY. He also remarks that it is a regular sight in Sycamore School to see teachers in the staffroom and elsewhere with large bundles of copies to correct. He suspects that this is rarely work from TY students.

There hasn't been much collective staff discussion about TY in Sycamore School. According to the coordinator,

> I think a lot of the problem is because only half of the staff are teaching it, so it's very difficult to fit it in to staff meetings. When somebody like L (from the Support Service) is talking to 25 people about TY, what do the other 25 do? ... The other reason, I suppose, unfortunately TY is still seen as the tail end of things; it's a year out; it's on the margins. I notice this in the homework, in the attitude by teachers, parents and students to homework.

The coordinator believes that the relationship between TY and the established LC is an important issue for all schools. The ambiguous nature of this relationship was identified in the first evaluation of the programme back in the late 1970s (Egan and O'Reilly, 1979) and continues to be a distinctive tension. The coordinator, who has a strong belief in the potential of TY, admits to some frustration in getting teachers focused on developing the programme. Subject departments tend not to be involved in designing the components of the programme. He says, 'Definitely, I would say each teacher, as opposed to each department, writes the programme.'

He is very frank about the obstacles coordinators can face when trying to get colleagues to commit to paper what they are doing in TY classes. For example, in response to a question as to whether having two class groups and two different teachers leads to two different programmes in some subjects, he says that 'the short answer is yes'. He would like to see the school move towards more of an agreed programme. He values the document *Writing the Transition Year Programme* (TYCSS, 1999a). Asked whether prior to this there were difficulties getting the programme written down, he responds:

> Yes, that was a hassle, but I think, in fairness, the reason it was hassle is because we didn't have the core template. If we had the core template it wouldn't be a problem.

As with a number of other coordinators in this study, the coordinator in Sycamore School appeared much more comfortable when talking about coordinating student

activities than when responding to questions relating to colleagues and their roles in TY.

Funding

The 2003 brochure distributed to parents included the following statement:

> Because of the extra-curricular activities, trips etc., that are organised, additional expenses above the normal school year may accrue. This generally does not come to more than €100 which is distributed throughout the year.

Fifty euro is collected from students in the April prior to TY. A further €50 is collected in September at the start of TY. This fund goes, for example, towards the hire of buses for trips to bowling, visits to universities and other third-level colleges during the year.

Summary

Of the four schools in this study, Ash School is the only one that requires students to follow the TY programme, with Beech School offering a choice between a two-year LCA and a three-year track to the traditional LC, via TY; and both Chestnut and Sycamore Schools giving students a choice. Most students in Beech and Chestnut Schools opt for the programme, whereas in Sycamore School an average of just 40 per cent of students do so.

In the case of schools that offer students a choice, the decision to opt for the TY programme appears to be strongly linked to the school's culture. In Sycamore School, for example, student and parental attitudes can militate against an extra year at school, which is commonly perceived as a 'doss year'. Some parents see TY 'as kind of on the margins' and fear that it may encourage their children to drop out of school before the LC. The response to this fear in Sycamore School has been to make the course 'as academic as possible', which may have the undesired effect of undermining the programme's raison d'être. This tension, between the 'academic' focus of the mainstream programme and the 'social/personal' focus of the TY programme, is an issue for most schools and perhaps an inevitable one given the optional nature of the programme. One teacher (Teacher 93) in Beech School captured the essence of the problem: 'I feel TY should be a compulsory part of the Irish Education System. The fact that some schools have abolished it suggests that it is not educationally beneficial.'

How schools organise TY usually reflects their mission statement. TY goals in Ash School appear to complement the emphasis on the holistic development of students. Strong levels of teacher commitment, an autonomous and well-respected TY coordinator and an evolving programme are among the key factors identified as contributing to the success of the programme. As a school designated 'disadvantaged', Beech School sees its mission as improving the life chances of its students, and participation in TY appears to deliver on this – with increased maturity in students, more informed subject choices, improved motivation for LC,

increased levels of examination achievement and greater participation at third-level. High levels of academic achievement are part of the Chestnut School tradition, where TY is seen as an opportunity to build a solid platform for the LC. The TY programme is structured into core elements, optional modules that have a strong emphasis on sampling for the LC, and additional modules that emphasise the breadth of possible experiences open to students. In Sycamore School, the strong academic emphasis in TY may reflect externals pressures (from parents in particular) rather than the school's overall aim, which is to provide 'an educational setting in which the person is encouraged to grow at every level – personally, academically, spiritually and culturally.' Students acknowledge the opportunity TY gives them to sample LC subjects, to test their capacity for honours levels at LC and to enhance oral language skills.

In general, students in the four schools tend to have a positive attitude to TY. They welcome the break it gives them from exam-dominated schooling, the development of stronger bonds of friendship with fellow students, the improved relationships between students and teachers, and the opportunities to sample different subjects, participate in work experience and trips outside the school, and consider different career options. Some Sixth year students in Chestnut School expressed the view that they might have preferred a 'three-year LC' approach, which again highlights the tension between the TY approach of holistic development, active learning and teaching methodologies, and intrinsic motivation for learning, and the pragmatic realities of the LC as a high-stakes examination.

Teachers in the four schools were also generally positive about TY. They saw it as giving students a broad educational experience, improving their maturity and confidence, helping them to become more socially aware and to clarify their career goals, and improving their LC results. Issues of some concern to teachers included appropriate methods of evaluation, planning time, in-service education, resources, the relationship between TY and the LC, the quality of written programmes, whether there should be prescribed subject syllabi, whether a three-

year LC programme should replace the TY programme and whether the TY programme is suited to students' needs and sufficiently challenging.

Parents' views on transition year vary from school to school. Although TY is compulsory in Ash School parents are provided with comprehensive information, even before their daughters enrol in First year. Information meetings and an impressive booklet about the TY programme are among the strategies aimed at keeping parents in touch. Explaining the merits of TY to parents in Beech School – many of whom have limited direct experience of senior cycle schooling – is a particular challenge. The school's policy of insisting that those hoping to pursue the LC must first take TY adds an even sharper edge to this challenge. The strong belief among Principal, coordinators and teachers in Beech School in the educational benefits of this approach is striking. Beech School has introduced, developed and sustained a TY programme against considerable odds. The Principal as well as the coordinators in Chestnut School encounter a broad spectrum of attitudes to TY among parents. Given the school's strong academic tradition and reputation, they are very aware that some need convincing. Parental scepticism tends to be either about the benefits of activities designed to advance personal and social development or concerning what is seen as a dilution of an academic dimension. In Sycamore School, resistance to TY by some parents is put forward as one of the reasons why a majority of students opt for a five-year cycle, without TY.

Conclusion

As the summary indicates, each school's engagement with TY is strongly influenced by that school's history, traditions, culture and sense of mission. The experiences of introducing and developing TY tends to reinforce the thrust of Chapter 2 which highlights the complexity of schools as organisations. That chapter's emphasis on the centrality of leadership for innovation is also strongly supported by the data from Chapter 4.

As the selected schools were part of the original cluster of schools chosen for the DES study, the particular TY programmes had to be well regarded. There is abundant evidence that in each school some very positive learning experiences for students and teachers are associated with TY. But for the researcher, especially in the light of his time working on the support services, there are some disturbing trends as well as disappointments. While the term *domestication* captures how a school adapts an innovation, three particular features of this phenomenon should prompt concern. Firstly, taken overall these schools tend to favour a cautious, somewhat conservative, interpretation of the TY *Guidelines* (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c). This is well illustrated in the weekly timetables presented. That caution seems particularly influenced by the long shadow cast over TY by the eLC. Furthermore, the mould-breaking features of TY such as work experience and community service activities, more democratic and participative classrooms and the use of more active learning and teaching methods inside and outside the classroom appear to be 'ring-fenced' within TY. It is as if TY is a 'parallel universe' to the other five years of schooling. Part of the disappointment is that if this level of caution is commonplace in schools where TY is 'well-regarded', what might be the situation in schools where the programme is not so well developed or, indeed, 'poorly-regarded'? While the potential colonisation of TY by the eLC has been identified, one senses that further exploration of this tension would point not only towards strongly instrumental views of schooling but also of a categoric distinction in many minds between 'academic learning' and other forms of engagement. These deep seated views contribute to unfortunate hierarchies of subjects and knowledge domains within schools. Thus education towards personal and social development, towards greater civic engagement, towards the development of practical skills or even interdisciplinary work is undervalued. Hence the very holistic thrust of TY is rejected.

A further conclusion worth noting from this chapter is how the professionals working in schools believe parents to be well informed about TY and how the parents interviewed see the situation very differently. It is clear that parents need much more information about and engagement with the values and practices associated with TY.

At this stage of the study, the breadth of issues related to TY is in danger of overwhelming the researcher and the reader. Thus, Chapter 5 attempts to synopsise the main findings and themes to emerge from the DES commissioned research. This is offered as a platform from which one can move to the subsequent chapter which involves engaging key policy makers and shapers with some of these findings and themes.

Chapter 5

Attitudes to Transition Year

As indicated in Chapter 3, the initial stage of the research involved investigating attitudes to Transition Year (TY) at six different school sites. This followed from the brief from the Department of Education and Science (DES) to research attitudes to TY 'in a small number of schools where TY is well regarded'. Extensive data were generated from students, teachers and parents about the TY in Ash School, Beech School, Chestnut School, Maple School, Oak School and Sycamore School. As a case study, the data from the various sites allow for a more composite view of the case of TY rather than individual fragments or components.

The central research question during this stage of the research was:

> What are the attitudes of the critical actors – students, teachers, parents and school leaders – towards TY and how do these attitudes manifest themselves in the operation of TY at six distinct school sites?

This chapter presents the main findings and themes emerging from the data from the six schools. The reader, having read Chapter 4, will be aware of the profiles of four of the six schools. As explained in Chapter 3, the researcher was of the opinion that detailed accounts of TY in four of the schools provide more nuanced insights into TY's operation. While TY in both Maple School and Oak School are also quite unique, there is also considerable overlap between their data and the four schools profiled in Chapter 4.

Dominant attitudes to TY

Overall, the students, parents and teachers in this study indicate predominantly positive attitudes towards TY. However, there are important variations among and within these categories.

Students interviewed during the course of a TY emerge as most enthusiastic about the programme, frequently contrasting their experiences with those of their Junior Cycle years. Their Third year peers tend to be poorly informed about TY and may have made up their minds about participation in TY well in advance of Third year. Young people in Fifth and Sixth years, while sharing many of the positive views of TY students, sometimes reflect an awareness of a tension between the broad education for maturity (in TY) and the demands of the LC and the associated points system.

Parents are also well disposed towards the programme. They tend to be reluctant to make generalisations about TY, often restricting their observations to what they observe in their own sons and daughters. They value, in particular, the perceived effects of greater social confidence and competence brought about by TY. Those interviewed indicated a hunger for more information about the details of, and rationale for, TY programmes.

Teachers were the most nuanced in their comments, frequently tempering their enthusiasm for the *idea* of TY with what they see as major challenges in implementing it. Teachers are particularly positive about the outcomes for students and about the impact TY makes on school life.
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Attitudes of Third Year Students

The views from Third year students may be regarded as significant because, as yet with no direct experience of TY, their attitudes are most likely to reflect broad public perceptions about the programme. Generally, across these six schools, Third year students tend to contrast TY with their current reality which

they describe, to varying extents, as a highly pressurised year where they perceive teachers as strongly focused on the Junior Certificate examination.

Their information about the merits or otherwise of TY tends to be quite impressionistic, though often quite insightful, and shaped by rumour and hearsay – the folklore of the schoolyard – rather than factual detail. Any negative impressions associated with TY can be picked up by JC students and used to support a preference for not following TY. The prevalence of such attitudes can have a direct impact on behaviour, most noticeably the decision whether or not to undertake TY. The majority of those interviewed had already made up their minds about doing TY or not, suggesting that decisions about following it or otherwise seem to be made by many students earlier than Third year.

Decisions by peers appear to influence some young people's decision to opt, or not, for TY, highlighting the power of 'the folklore of the schoolyard'. However, what individual teachers say, formally and informally, can also be significant in influencing individuals. This was most evident in the two schools designated 'disadvantaged', Beech School and Oak School.

Attitudes of TY students to the programme

The overwhelming message from students interviewed in the six schools during the course of their TY was that it was a very positive experience. Many contrasted TY favourably with the three years of Junior Cycle, often describing Third year in particular as a pressurized, stressful year. Many appreciate the freedom from examination pressure in TY. They believe that they benefit from TY in terms of growth in their own maturity, confidence and ability to perform in a variety of social settings. Students regularly report work experience placements, mini-company and excursions beyond the classroom as among the most significant and most enjoyable features of TY. Indeed, many student comments resonate loudly with the original articulation of the rationale for TY in 1974 by the then Minister for Education, Richard Burke, TD.

TY students offer similar evidence to their Third year peers regarding the influences that shape decisions to undertake or not undertake TY. Again, local folklore – anecdotes, incidents and broad impressions – are quoted extensively. The reported quality of the experiences of previous TY students within a particular school appears to carry significant weight. The reported role of parental influence on the decision to do TY or not seems to vary quite widely, For example, some students stated strongly that 'the decision was left up to me' while others indicated that there were heated discussions and debates within the family prior to deciding on TY. The data support and extend the finding by Smyth *et al.* as regards reasons for taking TY:

> In general, students in the case study schools decided to take the Transition Year programme because it provided a break from exam pressure and allowed them the space to think about their Leaving Certificate options and sample a range of different activities. (Smyth *et al.* 2004, p.45)

Attitudes of students in LC classes

While reinforcing many of the observations made by Fourth year students', those in Fifth and Sixth years tend also to make a number of additional points about TY.

According to Fifth and Sixth year students, the TY aim of developing personal and social competence is realised quite concretely in perceived improved relationships between students themselves during TY. In particular, excursions beyond the classroom are seen as strengthening bonds between students. Students state that more effective project work and better classroom discussion are among the consequences of these improved relations among students, though some are quick to point to the practical difficulties in working in groups and teams.

Like their Fourth year counterparts, many Fifth and Sixth year students identify TY as a time when they felt their opinions could be expressed freely and where they were listened to by their teachers. Some also spoke more about TY in terms of personal freedom and becoming more responsible for their own learning. A

shift towards more active, engaging forms of learning is detected, though students perceive this as more evident in some subjects than in others. Subjects or modules that were regarded as different from those studied in Junior Cycle tended to be well regarded as were opportunities to sample subjects with a view to informing students' choices for LC. However, 'continuity' or 'linear' subjects, that is those subjects that have already been studied in JC and will be continued on to LC, were spoken of by students in all six schools in the least positive light.

Parents' points of view

Parents were interviewed in two of the six schools. They indicated that their knowledge of the programme was limited. This was particularly evident among those parents whose children had not done TY. In contrast, 87 per cent of teachers believe 'Parents of Third year students are well informed about TY', and 81 per cent of them agree with the statement 'Parents are kept well informed about activities and events during TY.' This appears to be a striking difference in perceptions.

While the parents in Maple School and Oak School were positive about TY's contribution to their children's development, some concern about two possible negative outcomes were voiced. Firstly, there was apprehension that TY could drift from 'an academic focus'. Secondly, in Oak School – one of the two schools in the study with 'designated disadvantaged'[1] status – parents voiced concerns that, having undertaken a TY, a student might leave school before completing the LC.

In Oak School, parents also expressed some frustration, contrasting what they saw as a most worthwhile TY for their daughters with ones of a poorer quality for their sons.

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[1] In May 2005, the Minister for Education and Science launched a new plan for educational inclusion: *Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools (DEIS).* The new School Support Programme prioritises 150 second-level schools. Beech School and Oak School are included in that DEIS list.

Generally, parents expressed confidence in the TY programmes in Maple School and Oak School. They tended to identify TY very closely with the co-ordinator, speaking in very warm, appreciative terms about these two teachers in particular. Both sets of parents highlighted the variety of learning situations outside the classroom – trips, musicals, fund-raising projects etc. – as valuable opportunities that enabled their children to relate to each other and to their teachers in more varied ways than within conventional classrooms.

Teachers' perspectives

Because there are so many facets to the TY programme within a school it was decided to survey teachers' perspectives across an extensive range of issues. A detailed questionnaire (Appendix 3) elicited views on more than one hundred aspects of TY. The evidence points to teachers generally agreeing strongly with the aspirations of TY, recognising how many young people benefit from the programme, particularly in their personal and social development, but with a sophisticated range of reservations about aspects of the reality in practice. The high levels of agreement regarding particular statements have to be taken in the context of six schools all of whom had TY programmes that were 'well-regarded'.[2] Teachers' attitudes towards student outcomes and towards some features of programme implementation feature in later sections of this chapter. The detailed tables in Chapter 4 and the accompanying narrative further illustrate the range of perspectives.

Fundamental to the TY project is its location mid-way through adolescence and mid-way through second-level schooling. Teachers appear in little doubt about this as 91 per cent agree with the statement 'The TYP is a very appropriate programme for 15-16 year olds.'

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[2] The relatively high levels of agreement with particular statements can be seen as indicative of schools where TY has been implemented with some measure of success. The questions and the data in this report can then be seen as useful and relevant for any school wishing to engage in evaluating aspects of its TY programme (see Appendix 3) .

Individual respondents' perceptions of their own experience of teaching TY classes indicate variations in enthusiasm for certain facets of TY. For example some statements elicit more than 70 per cent assent.

- I like using active teaching and learning methodologies (87 per cent agree)
- I like teaching Transition Year classes (84 per cent)
- I like the freedom and flexibility which TY offers (81 per cent)
- I welcome the varied forms of assessment in TY (78 per cent)
- Lower percentages suggest more divided opinions. For example:
- Devising and operating new forms of assessment is difficult (70 per cent agree; 28 per cent disagree; 3 per cent no opinion)
- Teaching TY has helped my development as a teacher (69 per cent agree; 16 per cent disagree; 12 per cent no opinion)
- I like teaching mixed-ability classes (67 per cent agree; 21 per cent disagree; 12 per cent no opinion)
- I would prefer a prescribed syllabus for my subject (36 per cent agree; 53 per cent disagree; 10 per cent no opinion)
- Class sizes are too big (30 per cent agree; 63 per cent disagree ; 7 per cent no opinion)
- I would prefer a 3 year Leaving Certificate programme (22 per cent agree; 60 per cent disagree; 17 per cent no opinion)

These data take on further shades and hues when compared to how the 113 respondents perceive their teaching colleagues' responses to TY, for example:

- Teachers develop skills in TY which enhance their teaching in other years (83 per cent agree)
- TY promotes teamwork among teachers (78 per cent)
- Teachers respond well to the freedom and flexibility to design relevant programmes (77 per cent)
- Teaching TY promotes the professional development of teachers (72 per cent)
- Teachers find that there is a lack of resources for TY (57 per cent agree; 36 per cent disagree; 6 per cent no opinion)

- Teachers find mixed-ability classes difficult (47 per cent agree; 46 per cent disagree; 6 per cent no opinion)
- Teachers would prefer a prescribed syllabus for their subjects (42 per cent agree; 40 per cent disagree; 19 per cent no opinion)
- Teachers would prefer a 3-year Leaving Cert. Programme (35 per cent agree; 50 per cent disagree; 15 per cent no opinion)

As those latter statistics indicate, there are some conflicting attitudes about TY in school staffrooms; a capacity to generate contestation has always been a feature of TY. However, teachers' attitudes towards TY's place and status in the wider educational landscape indicate how perceptions of the programme have changed over 30 years, especially since the 1994 mainstreaming. For example:

- Transition Year is now firmly embedded in the Irish education system (75 per cent agree; 20 per cent disagree; 6 per cent no opinion)
- Transition Year is well regarded within the education system (55 per cent agree; 31 per cent disagree; 12 per cent no opinion)
- Students show little interest in TY (20 per cent agree; 76 per cent disagree; 5 per cent no opinion)
- The programme has a low status among teachers (24 per cent agree; 72 per cent disagree; 5 per cent no opinion)
- The TY programme has low status among students (28 per cent agree; 69 per cent disagree; 3 per cent no opinion)
- Transition Year is well supported by the Department of Education and Science (46 per cent agree; 37 per cent disagree; 17 per cent no opinion)

Thus, teachers' views of the perceived strengths of individual programmes in these six schools can be summarised as:

- Programmes that offer variety of content and experience, both inside and outside classrooms
- Programmes that are well structured and well co-ordinated
- Opportunities for students to relate to teachers over the course of the programme in co-operative ways that emphasise student responsibility and emerging maturity

- Teaching and learning methodologies that are active, offering students both stimulation and challenge.

Perceptions of outcomes for students

Maturity

A consistent thread through the data from all informants is that students are more mature as a result of the TY experience. Parents highlight growth in maturity as a major outcome. Ninety-three per cent of the teacher respondents believe that TY advances students' maturity. Principals, co-ordinators and students draw attention to the programme's maturing effects.

There is also strong agreement that TY promotes young people's confidence, improves bonds between classmates and facilitates better relationships between students and teachers. For example 97 per cent of teachers believe that students become more confident, 90 per cent that students become more socially aware, 90 per cent that students become more socially competent, 77 per cent that students develop technical skills,

Career Exploration

TY as a space where young people have time to explore career possibilities is an important dimension of the programme for many students. They value opportunities to sample subjects and modules that might assist in future subject or career choice, though there can be organisational and motivational difficulties associated with this dimension of TY. They see work experience placements as particularly effective in clarifying their thinking about employment. Ninety per cent of teachers believe that TY orientates students well to adult and working life. 88 per cent believe that TY assists students clarify career goals. Parents also value a focus on career guidance, often closely linking increased confidence and maturity with work experience placements.

Improved relationships between students and teachers

In each of the six schools, students consistently talk about TY as improving relationships between students and teachers. Many of the teachers also remark on this phenonomen, indicating that TY can be very effective in bringing about the changes in school culture at senior cycle advocated by the NCCA (2003b).

Beliefs about intellectual development

Parents' concern about 'academic focus' highlights an unease, also evident among some teachers and some Sixth year students, about the relationship between TY and the LC examination. Generally teachers appear confident that TY strikes a balance between education for personal and social development and intellectual development. As regards learning and motivational outcomes, for example, a majority of the teachers surveyed believe that:

- TY gives students a broad educational experience (98 per cent agree)
- Our programme provides students with intellectual challenge (85 per cent)
- Students' thinking and problem-solving skills are enhanced through TY (83 per cent)
- Students develop well in the absence of examination pressure (81 per cent)
- Students become more independent learners through TY (78 per cent)
- Students develop academic skills (70 per cent)
- Students become more motivated and self-directed as learners (70 per cent)

Beliefs regarding TY and LC

In the historical development of TY, as set out in Chapter 1, the ERC/NCCA longitudinal study of 1994 JC examination cohort was an important milestone. That study (Millar and Kelly, 1999) found that those who completed a TY achieved higher CAO points than those who did not.

As pointed out in Chapter 1, ironically, some schools subsequently found this data more effective at convincing students and their parents about the value of TY than extolling the virtues of a holistic educational experience.

Teachers' responses to questions about their beliefs regarding the TY – LC relationship indicate strong beliefs in TY as a foundation for the LC. Two-thirds of teachers believe in the 'higher results' effect, though nearly a quarter decided to express 'no opinion'.

- Students are better equipped for a Leaving Certificate programme after a TY (88 per cent agree)
- Students who follow a TY programme achieve higher results in the Leaving Certificate that those who don't (64 per cent agree; 13 per cent disagree; 23 per cent no opinion)

Teacher development

Student learning in school contexts depends greatly on the development of their teachers. When introducing TY in 1974, Richard Burke also saw engagement with the programme as a form of teacher development. The data here suggest that, for a majority of teachers, an important outcome of TY in a school is the impact it has on teachers' own personal and professional development. 83 per cent of teachers believe that they develop skills in TY which enhance their teaching in other years, and 72 per cent believe that teaching TY promotes their professional development as teachers.

Respondents' perceptions about effective implementation of TY

Breadth and balance

Thus, in these six schools, TY can be said to be succeeding in offering young people the 'broad educational experience with a view to the attainment of increased maturity' that is set out in *Transition Year Programmes, Guidelines for Schools* (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c, p.3). How have these schools interpreted and implemented these guidelines? It appears that the *breadth* of the

particular programmes is especially relevant; to be successful TY needs varied experiences inside and outside classrooms that are well-planned, engaging and developmental throughout the year. Students regularly report work experience placements, mini-company and excursions beyond the classroom as among the most significant and enjoyable features of TY. Within classrooms, they appreciate lessons that are more participative than what they encountered during Junior Cycle, lessons where their voices and opinions are sought and listened to.

In-school factors

TY emerges from the data as a complex programme that, to be implemented successfully, requires imagination, careful planning and effective co-ordination. Teachers are keenly aware of this. Across the six schools, teachers identify the most important in-school factors that contribute to the perceived success of their programmes as:

- The work done by the TY co-ordinator
- The TY programme that we as a school community designed
- The commitment of the teaching staff to the TY programme
- The work done by the core-team
- The students' interest in a commitment to the TY programme

The same teachers view the following five in-school factors as the ones that militate most against the success of TY:

- Lack of sufficient time for teachers to work together in planning the TY programme
- Limited in-service training
- Students' lack of interest in and commitment to the TY programme
- A shortage of finance
- The absence of regular review and evaluation of the TY programme.

External factors

Moving to external factors that support the development of TY in a school, teachers rate as most important:

- The work experience opportunities provided by employers
- The engagement with the local community, and
- The involvement and support of parents.

On the other hand, the external factors that these teachers see as most impeding the development of TY include:

- Negative attitudes of some parents
- A perception – among some parents, students and teachers – that it is an 'easy' year
- Part-time work
- Costs associated with TY.

Learning beyond the classroom

As mentioned above, 'breadth' as a characteristic of the six individual programmes appears to be especially significant. This is noticeably evident in what might be called 'calendar items', that is, once-off learning experiences that complement the weekly timetable. Students consistently refer to learning experiences beyond the classroom as the highlights of TY. Activities such as work experience placements, community service, outdoor pursuits activities, trips to the Gaeltacht, to museums, art galleries and other sites of learning, musicals and dramas, participation in events such as the Young Scientists or in fund-raising activities can capture young people's imagination and engagement. When these activities are directly linked to formal timetabled classes, the learning appears to be enhanced. Projects that extend over a number of weeks, involve a cross section of students and teachers, and conclude with some kind of demonstration event or performance, appear very effective. In particular, such projects seem to engage students' imagination, boost their morale and motivation for learning and contribute to TY's distinct identity within the school community. Of course, these outcomes depend greatly on significant input of

time and energy by teachers. There can also be additional expenses associated with some projects.

Teaching and Learning

However, while there is great student enthusiasm for excursions beyond the classroom and project work, students have much less to say about classroom experiences. In general, students welcome the absence of exam pressure in TY, suggesting that, in some cases, classes are more participative and democratic. A number suggest that the absence of exam pressure can be especially liberating for teachers. However, students, even when pressed, had difficulty in providing examples of the 'wide range of teaching/learning methodologies and situations' (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993, p.8) envisaged in the *Guidelines,* especially from the more regular classes. When encountered, experiential learning and well-structured project work is appreciated. It may well be that it is actually the quality of the teaching and learning interactions within subjects/modules that are key to the effective implementation of TY. The evidence suggests that students want classes that will engage and challenge them. Those who spoke about being 'stretched' by the demands of TY whether in terms of time and effort, socially or intellectually, valued these challenges and were particularly resentful of any suggestion that TY was a 'doss' year. At the same time, students indicate that they can distinguish between those teachers with strong commitments to TY and those for whom they think it may not be a priority. Furthermore, students in Fifth and Sixth years, while valuing the TY experience, tend to look back at missed opportunities, sometimes suggesting that the school might have done more, sometimes being critical of their own limited engagement, sometimes of their teachers or the TY programme.

In the data from teachers, many features of the TY programme in Maple School were consistently rated higher than any of the other five schools, particularly related to teaching and learning. According to the TY co-ordinator and a number of teachers, Maple School's TY programme construction was strongly influenced by Gardner's theory, discussed in Chapter 2. Their experience appears to go against the grain of some of Cuban's (2004, p.141) assertions, also in Chapter 2.

Significant omissions

While each school interprets the *Guidelines* in a distinct way, selecting and adapting particular features of TY, some aspects of the programme receive limited attention. While students indicate some use of the 'wide range of teaching/learning methodologies and situations' envisaged by the *Guidelines*, the evidence suggests that limited implementation of these in the more regular, timetabled 40-minute classes. Further omissions become obvious when weekly timetables in the six schools are analysed. For example, only a small number of cross-curricular modules are offered. Indeed, in all six timetables what might be called 'traditional subjects' dominate, perhaps reflecting the need to maintain subject continuity between the JC and the LC. There is very little evidence of schools embracing the perspective in the *Guidelines* that asserts 'An interdisciplinary approach would help create that unified perspective which is lacking in the traditional compartmentalised teaching of individual subjects' (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c, p.6). Traditional 'balkanisation' (Hargreaves, 1994) relating to teacher and subject domain isolation and insulation appears to survive well within TY. This points to some interesting challenges, and opportunities, for the NCCA as it constructs Transition Units.

Student suggestions

Asked for suggestions about enhancing the programme, TY students' suggestions for improving TY programmes cluster around five major themes and can be summarised as follows:
- Ensure greater distribution of events throughout the year
- Undertake more work with students whose motivation and attendance is poor.
- Make the trips beyond the classroom less expensive
- Schools should learn from the good practice in other schools
- Junior Cycle students and their parents need more specific information about TY

Teachers' perspectives on school organisation

As indicated earlier, teachers' perspectives on TY in the schools where they work are broadly positive. For example:

- Our TY programme is well co-ordinated (93 per cent agree)
- Our programme presents students and teachers with good opportunities for learning beyond the classroom (90 per cent)
- Our programme is well-thought-out (88 per cent)
- Our programme has breadth and balance (86 per cent)
- Our programme is well-tailored to our students' needs (81 per cent)
- Our written TY programme is very good (75 per cent)
- The assessment techniques used in TY are appropriate (74 per cent)
- Our approach to evaluation is progressive (63 per cent)

These data tend to confirm that the relatively successful implementation of TY is, therefore, closely associated with ensuring that basic features such as programme planning, breadth, assessment and evaluation receive attention. However, such high levels of agreement suggest that some of the contested aspects, as indicated at the start of this chapter, are especially significant. As these include attitudes to a prescribed syllabus, a three-year LC and teaching mixed-ability classes, it is clear that, even in schools where TY is well regarded, some major divergence of teacher opinion on crucial aspects of the programme can persist.

School leadership

Responsibility for the practical implementation of TY within a school context falls heavily on the shoulders of principals, deputy principals and programme co-ordinators. Teachers show a keen awareness of this and, as seen above, identify 'The work done by the TY co-ordinator' as the most important in-school factor that contribute to the relative success of these programmes.

As is evident in the school profiles, good working relationships between principals and co-ordinators contribute significantly to TY's coherence. While all six principals delegated real authority to co-ordinators (most explicitly in Ash School and in Maple School), they also maintained a strong interest in and

commitment to TY. For example, they tended to be publicly associated with explaining TY to parents. They were also well disposed towards including TY on staff meeting agendas, towards allocating time for planning and evaluation, and towards facilitating co-ordinators and teachers to engage in in-service education.

Timetabling

Evidence of attitudes to programme implementation is reflected in the weekly TY timetables operated in these six schools. Imaginative use, for example of re-structuring the school year, of novel modules, of the use of double and triple periods and of co-ordinator contact time with students can all be seen. Less positively, there is also evidence of teachers being timetabled for limited contact with TY students. In some cases this is as low as a single class period per week. In some of the schools, students encounter more than twice the number of classroom teachers during TY as compared to a typical Third year or Fifth years. Such practices seem to undermine the development of the enhanced relationships that both students and teachers appear to value and are questionable timetable practices.

Challenges to school organisation

While the evidence suggests that many of the challenges associated with TY are ones of imagination and courage, the issue of finance is real. In the two schools designated 'disadvantaged', there is a belief that 'the playing field is uneven', that other schools can, with relative ease, seek payments and voluntary subscriptions from parents to support TY activities. Given the importance attached by students to excursions beyond the classroom, funding is a crucial issue. As is evident in the school profiles, each of the six schools takes a different approach to the funding issue. As the Principal of Beech School notes, it is remarkable that the original grant of £50 (€63.49) per TY student,

introduced in 1994, has never been increased despite inflation and the 'Celtic Tiger' years[3].

Co-ordination

In each of the six schools, TY co-ordinators emerge as pivotal in the daily functioning of TY. They are a focal point for students and their parents, sometimes strongly identified as the 'public faces' of TY in a school. Frequently, the co-ordinator organises many of the extra-classroom activities and 'once-off' calendar items that students value so highly. Through commitment and hard work these co-ordinators have earned the respect of students, parents and, critically, given the hierarchical nature of many school cultures, their colleagues.

However, while co-ordinators are key players in the construction of a successful TY, this is also a potential weakness. Many of the issues, especially relating to the demands on time, found in the TYCSS (2000b) survey of co-ordinators are reinforced in this study. While one school, Chestnut School, operates an effective dual system of co-ordination, and another, Beech School, had a policy of rotating co-ordinators, an image emerges from the school profiles of TY being heavily dependent on a single, highly committed co-ordinator. The *Guidelines* notion of a co-ordination team of 'four or five teachers' (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c, p.11) appears difficult to organise.

While co-ordinators are comfortable in leading and directing students, they are much more reticent when it comes to their teaching colleagues. As people who tend to 'want to get things done', co-ordinators admit that they often prefer to undertake a task themselves rather than ask a colleague. Strong traditions of teacher independence and autonomy in relation to their own classrooms present particular challenges for TY, where ideally the programme needs to be integrated, with components complementing each other. At a very practical

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[3] This data was compiled, analysed and presented to the DES in mid-April 2007. At the TY Conference on 20th April, Minister Mary Hanafin announced that the grant would be increased to €100 per student. This took effect in September 2007. Given the strong feelings of the Principal in Beech School in particular about this issue, and later emerging issues, it seems appropriate to include it here.

level, this is illustrated by the difficulties some schools have encountered in writing the programme. While obviously the curriculum as experienced by students is most important, a written version can contribute to coherence and continuity. A written programme can also facilitate evaluation.

The *Guidelines* advocate whole-school involvement in planning TY, and in its annual evaluation. Little evidence was found to indicate that this happens, or that all stakeholders are consulted with any regularity. In practice, subject departments have had limited involvement in the planning and evaluation of particular subjects/modules, with responsibility often devolving to the individual teacher timetabled for a subject or module. While some teachers respond imaginatively to such opportunities, co-ordinators sometimes express frustration at the difficulty in establishing what other colleagues actually do in their TY classrooms. Such loose arrangements can lead to disjointed, fragmented modules, subjects and programmes. Such lack of structure can make teaching TY even more daunting, particularly for those coming to teach a TY class for the first time; what looks like autonomy becomes isolation.

Teachers' needs

Teachers indicate an awareness of the pitfalls of isolation. Three-quarters of them concur with the statement 'I would like more time for planning TY classes with colleagues' (75 per cent agree) and 'I would like more in-service training for TY' (76 per cent). Limited in-career education for teachers has been, as seen in Chapter 1, a feature of TY's history. When the support services were put in place, in 1994 and subsequently, strategic decisions were made to prioritise co-ordinators for professional development. Co-ordinators in this study indicate an appreciation of this service. However, while this approach has undoubtedly been effective in many cases, a consequence has been that other teachers can feel neglected. Some informants contrasted the limited provision for teachers of TY with the programme of support for LCA in its initial years of development. The data point to a need for more extensive support for teachers of TY. At school level, time for teachers to learn from each other might be generated through the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI). At local, network levels, the

potential for Education Centres and Subject Associations to support TY's ongoing development seems obvious. Finally, co-ordinators and some principals recall that in the early days of mainstreaming (1995-1998) there were 14 teachers on secondment dedicated to supporting TY. While the current SLSS structure is different and aims for more integrated support across a range of programmes, co-ordinators tend to talk of the support service as 'being down to one person now'.

School differences

As is evident in the school profiles, Ash School, Beech School, Chestnut School, Maple School, Oak School and Sycamore School conceptualise and implement TY in quite different ways. In terms of attitudes to the theory and practice of TY as set out in the *Guidelines*, the most positive perspectives are found in Maple School, the smallest of the six schools. Strongly positive attitudes are also very evident in Ash School, the one school in the study where TY is compulsory, and in Beech School and Oak School, both of which are designated 'disadvantaged'. While positive attitudes to the programme predominate in Sycamore School and Chestnut School, TY is more contested in these schools, as is evident in the data from students, teachers and principals and co-ordinators.

Distinct identities

Each TY programme has a particular identity which distinguishes it from every other TY. In shaping and adapting the TY curriculum, each school tends to play to its own particular strengths, consolidating an aspect of an established identity or responding to a perceived need.[4] The vision of individual principals, co-

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4 In *Attitudes to Transition Year* (Jeffers, 2007a, p.263) 'domestication' is explained as follows: '…This adaptation or domestication of TY can be seen as each school putting its own distinctive local shape on the TY programme, of power devolving from the DES to the local school. At its most positive, TY can be viewed as a national programme with sufficient flexibility to enable genuine accommodation to the specific circumstances of individual schools, respecting their particular histories, traditions, values and contexts, playing to the strengths of teaching teams and geared to the developmental needs of students. However, … *domestication* can also be viewed less favourably. The very flexibility of TY that facilitates imagination and innovation can also be invoked by schools to justify a narrow selectivity that ignores key features of the TY programme. In each school in this study there is evidence of the non-implementation of particular features of the *Guidelines*.

ordinators or teachers can be important shapers of these programmes. For example, in Beech School, a designated 'disadvantaged' co-educational community college, TY is regarded as important in increasing students' chances of advancing towards Third level education. Maple School, a relatively new school, discovered that TY opened up valuable connections with the local community and heightened the profile of the school. In Oak School and in Ash School, the two-all girls-schools in the study, a very clear commitment to education for personal and social development is evident in how they conceptualise the programme. Of course, in all six schools, the reality of the LC examination looms, at times like a dark shadow, over TY. All recognise TY's role in 'laying a solid foundation for Leaving Certificate studies' (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c, p.5), though this manifests itself quite differently across the six schools. An emphasis on high academic achievement is particularly evident in Ash School, Chestnut School and Sycamore School.

Promoting TY: compulsory or optional?

Clear indicator of school differences emerge when discussing questions of student uptake of TY. In Ash School, the rationale for making TY compulsory is well argued, though clearly challenges exist in such contexts. The two schools designated 'disadvantaged', Beech School and Oak School, are keenly aware of scepticism among students and their parents about TY and talk frankly about the challenges this presents. Data from the parents in Oak School is especially revealing in this regard. Chestnut School enjoys high rates of participation in TY while Sycamore School and Maple School speak about the need to convince each new cohort of students and parents of the benefits of the programme. Patterns of uptake, as well as decisions by schools whether to make TY optional or compulsory, underlines the uniqueness of each school's context. As already mentioned, the costs associated with TY is a particular consideration and the lack of any increase in the £50 (€63.49) per student grant impacts most negatively on schools designated 'disadvantaged[5]'.

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[5] See Footnote No 3

Relationship between TY and the rest of the school

Two of the consistent themes highlighted throughout the data are improved student-teacher relationships and the positive impact TY has on school life in general. At the same time, the evidence is also clear that TY, sandwiched between the Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate programmes, with their associated high-status terminal examinations, is constrained by these realities.

Improved relationships

Students regard the experiences of interacting with teachers in situations outside the traditional classroom setting, for example on outings and trips away, as major contributors to the improving relationships. Students also point to teachers being more relaxed, inside and outside classrooms, when, as a number of them remarked, the teachers are freed from the pressure of examinations. More participative classrooms also appear to facilitate improved relationships.

Relationships between TY and the school climate

Teachers across the six schools perceive a leavening impact of TY on the whole school community. A recurring theme among students is how they perceive TY as more engaging – and less stressful – than their JC experience. The perceived improvement in student-teacher relationships observed by students, teachers and parents, is frequently identified as enhancing the whole school climate.

 Teachers who express reservations about facets of the programme were keen to acknowledge that TY's arrival heralded some transformation in the school's climate, with student maturity, sense of responsibility and confidence as persistent themes. Indeed, at times it seemed that these six schools are well advanced on the journey envisaged by the NCCA towards a vision of 'a different school culture for senior cycle students' (NCCA, 2003b, p.4). In Sycamore School, to give one particular example, the Principal observed that those who participated in TY tend to set academic standards for the whole school and demonstrate positive leadership among the student body. To support this point,

he cited the strong representation of former TY students among the Sixth year prefect group.

On the other hand, as evident throughout the data, TY lives in the permanent shadow of the LC. When talking about TY, principals, co-ordinators, teachers, students and parents use the LC exam, and the associated points system, as a sort of ultimate reference point. Timetable nomenclature resonates with LC subjects. There are both positive and negative facets to this TY-LC relationship. There is evidence that

> Pupils entering the Leaving Certificate programme on completion of a Transition Year should be better equipped and more disposed to study than their counterparts who did not have the benefit of the year.

> (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c, p.5)

The LC provides a very clear motivational focus for many students, teachers and their parents. Furthermore, some evaluations relating to TY have focused on the programme's positive impact on LC results. Clearly, improved academic achievement can have a positive impact on school morale.

On the other hand, there is also evidence that, in some subjects, the LC has effectively colonised TY, so that in those subjects something very close to a three-year LC programme operates. One of the main themes coming from the data is that the TY – LC relationship can be an uneasy one. There can be a tension between the TY focus on personal and social development and the demands for LC points. In Chestnut School, for example, some Sixth year students expressed regret that more time had not been spent during TY starting the LC course in particular subjects. In the same school 39 per cent of the teachers indicated that they would like a three-year LC. Similarly, TY's drive towards promoting intrinsic motivation for learning can sit uncomfortably in a school with the strong emphasis on external motivation that the LC seems to engender.

The Fifth Year challenge

When TY is optional, newly formed Fifth year class groups can present particular challenges. A group of students fresh from their TY experience may not gel immediately with those who have come straight from completing the JC. Perceptions of different levels of relative maturity/immaturity can cause tensions. Co-ordinators confirm that some teachers remark that, when they have taught a group of students in TY, a bond develops that strengthens through the LC years and is not necessarily as strong with those who did not do TY. That said, some are quick to point to many students who went straight from Third to Fifth year and thrived, intellectually and socially.

Overall effects

Arising from the questions posed at the outset of this chapter, the dominance of positive attitudes towards TY in six schools where the programme is well regarded have been illustrated. Students, teachers and parents indicate strong beliefs in the programme's contribution to young people's maturity, increased confidence and more mature relationships with their peers and with adults. Some specific pointers towards practical implementation have emerged from the data.

One of the most ambitious aspirations in the *Guidelines* is that

> The aims and philosophy of Transition Year should permeate the entire school.   (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c, p.4)

Perceptions among participants in this research suggest that TY is perceived as a significantly different experience to the other five years of schooling. There has been some percolation of TY values throughout the school community but also some resistance to such values. Even in these six schools where TY is 'well regarded', areas of contestation remain as innovation is tempered by resistance.

Recommendations

Following delivery of the report *Attitudes to Transition Year,* the Research Committee requested a set of recommendations. The researcher declined, explaining that in his opinion this was not appropriate for a case study where the full report illuminated the very layered and nuanced nature of TY and the many shades of attitudes to it. The researcher said that he feared if a set of recommendations were appended then the report would, in effect, be reduced to these ten or twenty points.

This was initially accepted by the committee but, following a further meeting, a more insistent request for a set of recommendations reminded the researcher that the DES had funded the project. Furthermore, by this stage the report had been sent to a number of people and it was clear that its sheer size was intimidating and few had actually read it through. So, the researcher changed his mind and attempted to focus the thrust of the research into a series of seventeen recommendations. They were:

All Stakeholders

1. A reading of the full report should confirm the view that attitudes to Transition Year, including perceptions of its meaning and purpose – whether by students, parents, teachers or as found in official policy – are characterised by some ambiguity. The heart of the struggle to convince stakeholders of the value of Transition Year centres on fundamental questions about the purposes of schooling for mid-adolescents. In particular, TY highlights a tension between perceptions of learning to pass examinations and learning for personal and social development. Thus, school communities – as well as the wider society – could benefit greatly by engaging in more open discussion and clarification of the responsibility of schools to provide a holistic education to the full range of young people and to promote school cultures that sustain such education.

Inclusion

2. In order to achieve greater inclusion and equity, schools that currently do not offer TY as an option need to be encouraged and supported to do so. These supports should include financial assistance and programmes of professional development for teachers.

Optional -compulsory

3. It should be compulsory for all schools to offer TY, though not necessarily compulsory for all students to follow the programme.

Financial Support

4. Consideration should be given to restructuring the student grant (increased to €100 per student in September 2007) to assist smaller schools, in particular, in offering TY. One possibility would be that all schools receive a minimum TY grant of €2,000, irrespective of the number of students in TY, and then €100 for each student in excess of 20. Additional, once-off, financial resources to assist schools in planning to introduce TY – for team meetings, staff development, visiting other schools, developing the curriculum – would also be helpful.

Professional development and networking

5. The history of TY's development (Chapter 1) suggests that the attempt (in 1994) to mainstream the programme was successful partly because the strategy included financial incentives and partly because school involvement in 'locally and regionally based programmes of staff development/in-service education' was a condition of participation (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c, p.13) The evidence from the six schools in this study (Chapter 6) indicates the value of enabling schools to tell their own TY stories. Local and regional networks to facilitate the exchange of experience between schools – including between principals, between co-ordinators and between teacher of specific modules and subjects – need greater support, especially where there is perceived competition between neighbouring schools. Education Centres and Curriculum Development Centres can play key roles in this.

DVD technology also offers opportunities for schools to demonstrate TY classes in action.

Active methodologies

6. Based on data from teachers, (see, for example, p.119, p.294), support for teachers to develop greater use of active learning methodologies in linear or continuity subjects (subjects like English, Irish, Mathematics etc. that students must take in both Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes) should be prioritised.

Schools

7. To avoid fragmentation of TY programmes and promote greater coherence, the evidence suggests that four activities, in particular, are likely to contribute to coherence rather than fragmentation in TY programmes. They are planning and writing the programme, communicating with parents, the role the co-ordinator and the quality of in-school leadership.(see pps. 259, 261, 273 sqq. 280, 297)

Teaching Teams

8. Teaching teams within schools need to spend time together to devise and revise engaging and stimulating TY programmes. Frameworks to support such activities include the 1993 Department of Education publication *Transition Year Programme: Guidelines for Schools* and the resources available through the TY Support Service at www.ty@slss.ie

Cost burden

9. While opportunities for 'learning beyond the classroom' can contribute significantly to the TY experience, schools need to be attentive to the cost burden on some families associated with particular activities and should seek to maximise the many educational opportunities that are available at relatively low cost.

Policy-makers and schools

10. The danger of TY being colonised by the established Leaving Certificate is ever present (see p.265, p.302, p.305). Transition Units and other aspects of senior cycle schooling should be developed in ways that ensure that such colonisation does not occur. Maintaining TY's 'stand-alone' status as a year-long process is one way of ensuring this. Furthermore, policy-makers and schools should seek ways of spreading the practices and benefits of TY learning experiences to enrich the other five years of secondary schooling (see p.312 sqq)

TY and LCA

11. Pathways need to be developed to facilitate students who, during the course of TY, decide that Leaving certificate Applied is a more appropriate follow-up course than the established Leaving Certificate. Recognition of TY modules for LCA accreditation purposes could contribute to this.

Parents

12. Given parents' enthusiasm for a greater understanding of the values, possibilities and challenges associated with TY (see Chapter 5), schools need to be proactive in engaging parents of all students in discussions about TY. Such discussions need to extend well beyond the once-off meeting during Third Year. At national level, there should be greater involvement of the National Parents Council –post-primary in promoting TY.

Assessment

13. Although the liberating effect on students and teachers of moving from an 'exam-led' focus to a 'learning-led' one is a distinct feature of TY, schools can enhance structure, coherence, motivation and credibility by applying innovative forms of assessment – particularly those that actively engage students in the process.

Agency co-operation

14. At national level, responsibility for promoting and developing TY needs to be more coherent and less fragmented (see, for example, Chapter 1). This requires greater leadership and co-operation between agencies such as the Department of Education and Science, the National council for Curriculum and Assessment, the Second-level Support Service and the School Development Planning Initiative.

Initial teacher education

15. Preparation for teaching Transition Year needs to be coherently integrated into programmes of initial teacher education so that student teachers appreciate its history, development and rationale, can devise programmes that are relevant, imaginative and challenging, and employ appropriate methodologies and assessment processes. Teaching council support for teaching TY, including recognition of specific competencies, would enhance its status and advance its development.

Inspectorate

16. Given the layered complexity of TY programmes as indicated in this report, inspection of TY programmes should go beyond looking at individual components of the TY programme as seen, for example, in some recent Whoel School Evaluation Reports. The DES Inspectorate needs to give careful attention to how the overall programme fits into the context of each school including who follows the programme and who doesn't, its breadth and balance, how the school has domesticated it, its relationship with other senior cycle programmes, teachers' professional development and the application of assessment procedures.

Further study

17. TY practice could benefit from further research into:
    a. Views and experiences of schools that do not currently offer TY;
    b. Timetabling in TY, including block structures, modules, teaching teams and the variations on the traditional 40 minute class period.

c. How TY relates to other second-level programmes: the Junior Certificate, the established Leaving certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

Conclusion

This chapter provides a distilled overview of the complexity of TY, particularly from the attitudes to the programme in various schools. As already indicated, the recommendations that complete this chapter were made to the DES with some reluctance. Furthermore, the researcher has suggested that, if asked to make recommendations now, there would be a different emphasis. The need to re-visit the basic TY guidelines (Ireland, Department of Education, 1976; CEB, 1986b; Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c) as well as the *Resource Material* (Doyle *et al.* 1994) and to tease out in some detail how these might be realised is urgent.

The impending fourth stage of TY's development, involving the development of Transition Units, represents a new set of challenges. On the one hand individual schools and teachers who have engaged seriously with TY's ambition need to be encouraged and find further support within the TU framework. At the same time, schools that have struggled with establishing meaningful TY programmes need a framework that will enable them to grow as learning communities. The possibility of the NCCA being regarded as a type of educational supermarket where schools go to collect a basketful of ready-cooked TUs (Transition Units) for easy consumption may not be a total fantasy. Lack of time for teachers to plan together on top of existing pressures in schools can squeeze out the space needed for colleagues work together to create appropriate TY programmes. Teacher education programmes related to TY are severely underdeveloped and a comprehensive programme is desirable.

A range of agencies share responsibility for nurturing and developing TY within the formal schooling system. One of the values of the set of recommendations is that they act as a kind of shorthand for some of the main issues. Thus, they can

be a template through which the perspectives of particular agencies can be evaluated. The next chapter looks at the views of nine people in senior positions in agencies with a particular interest in, and in some cases responsibility for, TY.

Chapter 6

The views of policy shapers and makers on Transition Year

Introduction

This chapter summarises the main perspectives of nine people[1] involved in shaping and making educational policy. Prior to interviewing, the researcher sent a summary of the main points from the first part of the research, a weblink to the full report and a set of questions to each participant. (Appendix 3). The interviews were taped, lasted an hour each and generated over 300 pages of transcripts. From listening to the tapes and analysing the transcripts, a selection of these participants' perceptions of and attitudes to TY are dealt with under four broad headings. First, there is an overview of how they perceive the TY project in general. The second section explores how these informants see TY in the wider context of second-level schooling. Next, how each agency regards its relationship with and support for TY is presented. Finally, the chapter recounts how these nine people view TY's future development.

There are sub-sections within each section, usually reflecting specific issues that arose during the interview. Inevitably, with such rich data, extensive sections of the interviews are not included verbatim. The selection was informed by a combination of the relevance of the responses to the research question and by an attempt to capture the unique perspective of each participant. Undoubtedly, with such a selection, the researcher's own viewpoint of what's important is central and so this chapter is both descriptive and evaluative. Such combinations are features of the case study approach.

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1 Sinéad Breathnach, School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI); Michael Garvey, Second-Level Support Service (SLSS); Éilis Humphreys, Leadership Development for Schools (LDS); Moira Leyden, Education Officer, Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland (ASTI); Anne Looney, Chief Executive, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA); Marian Lyon, National Parents Council, Post-Primary (NPCpp); John MacGabhann, Assistant Secretary General, Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI); Mary McGlynn, National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD); Eamon Stack, Chief Inspector, Department of Education and Science (DES)

Indeed, the key is not to eliminate the evaluative component for descriptions in educational research 'since this just dilutes them and compromises their usefulness. The key is to get the description right'. (Howe and Moses, 1999, p.45)

Participants' perceptions of TY

Enthusiasm

Overall, these interviewees articulate a broadly positive view of TY.

Eamon Stack, Chief Inspector DES, believes that the mainstreaming of TY demonstrated that schools had the capacity to innovate. He recalls that it was unusual for schools to be given such freedom and for the Department to say:

> Each school is trusted to do a professional job, to take on board all the various elements and issues and constraints that apply in providing a programme such as a Transition Year. The Principal and his/her team work through them as any leader or good manager would and come up with the best solution in the particular set of circumstances.

He emphasises the varied circumstances of different schools and believes that most schools have responded well, adding an opinion about the overall TY programme: 'I think it is one of the flagships of our education system at second-level.'

Moira Leyden, ASTI, is enthusiastic about how TY facilitates closer links between schools and their local communities. It's a theme also picked up by Marion Lyon, NPCpp. As was very evident in Maple School, and to a lesser extent in the other schools, when parents encounter TY positively they sometimes begin to reappraise a school. Marion Lyon says**:**

> When they learn there is a fantastic TY programme it really can motivate that whole sense of goodwill towards the school within the community. I have seen that happen in the area. I have looked and I have heard parents talk about that around the country. And it can also really motivate teachers to play an active role in curriculum development.

Eilis Humphreys (LDS), Sinéad Breathnach (SDPI), Mary McGlynn (NAPD), John MacGabhann (TUI), Michael Garvey (SLSS) and Anne Looney (NCCA) make positive references to their own experiences of teaching TY classes[2]. The first three, all former school principals, also recall TY having a positive impact on the schools where they worked.

Tensions

Side by side with their enthusiasm for TY, these participants also see paradoxes, tensions and unrealised potential. At the heart of these tensions are concerns about what are sometimes referred to as 'core' or 'continuity' subjects (Egan and O'Reilly, 1979; Jeffers, 2007a, p. 296).

Indeed, a striking feature of the discourse among these interviewees is the dominance of traditional subject categories. There is little or no evidence of a cross-curricular perspective or even a perspective on 'areas of experience[3]'. There is an acknowledgement that some subjects enjoy a higher status than others. The subject pre-eminence is clearly associated with a keen awareness that the established eLC casts a

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[2] In many of the interviews it emerged that the interviewees' organisations had, at best, weakly articulated policies regarding TY. The NCCA was an obvious exception. Furthermore, in the interviews with Michael Garvey, Éilis Humphreys, Mary McGlynn and John MacGabhann, it was clear that they were drawing extensively on their own personal histories of working in schools that offered TY. Personal experience was also alluded to by Eamon Stack, Sinéad Breathnach, Moira Leyden and Anne Looney. In a number of cases, there was an acknowledgement that these policy shapers' and makers' views were sometimes based on experience in a particular school some years previously or were informed by anecdote rather than either solid data or policy. For example, when discussing timetabling, Michael Garvey, SLSS, remarked frankly: 'I don't have enough contact with TY in schools at that level.'

[3] In some of the documents published by the CEB and later the NCCA, the idea of eight areas of experiences was mooted, based on Lawton, D (1983) *Curriculum Studies and Educational Planning,* London: Hodder and Stoughton. The eight areas were: Arts Education; Guidance and Counselling; Language and Literature; Mathematical Studies; Physical Education; Religious Education; Science and Technology; Social, Political and Environmental Studies. In the *Guidelines for Schools* (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c) 15 'possible areas of experience' are proposed in Appendix 1. These are: Civic, Social and Political Education; Personal and Social Development; Guidance; Religion; Philosophy; Aesthetic Education; Physical Education; Language Studies; (Irish, English and Other Languages); Mathematics; Science Studies; Environmental Studies; Information Technology; Practical Studies; Business and Enterprise Studies; Preparation for Adult and Working Life.

particular shadow over the construction of TY programmes. The views expressed reinforce the finding that 'the danger of TY being colonised by the established Leaving Certificate is ever present' (Jeffers, 2007b, p. 32).

As a diagnostic tool for examining TY, the 'onion[4]' (TYCSS, 1998; Jeffers, 2007a, p. 265) appears effective. Qualitative differences between the layers of a TY programme are clear to Anne Looney. 'I think on the ground in schools it (TY) can be very uneven. You can have the continuity subjects still seen simply as doing a bit of the Leaving Cert. I think that is still there. Very often.'

She knows of some schools 'that do a huge amount' to make connections between all components of TY in order to give a more integrated learning experience. This can be difficult, she contends, because of the hegemony of certain subjects, particularly English and Mathematics, within schools. She also believes that there is strong parental support for 'subjects that are high up the hierarchy' to have a strong identity in TY.

Regarding interdisciplinary learning, Looney believes that those teachers whose initial teacher education has been concurrent are more likely to be comfortable with, and enthusiastic about, cross-curricular work than those who have become teachers through a PGDE (HDE) route.[5] She cites teachers of Art, Religious Education and Home Economics as having: 'a more integrated preparation, 'whereas your English/Maths/Science teacher is much more subject-defined'. She also contends that those who have been through a concurrent teacher education programme are likely to be over-represented among TY co-ordinators, adding the caveat, 'It's a gut feeling. I don't

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[4] This involves a four-fold, layered approach to constructing and deconstructing TY programmes. On the outer layer are once-off (often high profile) calendar events such as work experience placements, musicals and trips. Immediately inside is a layer of TY specific modules, often interdisciplinary, connected loosely if at all with JC/LC subjects. Further inside is a layer of subject sampling modules that enable students taste a variety of subject areas. Finally, in the inner 'core' are the continuity subjects those such as English, Maths and languages that follow-on from subjects studied in JC towards LC.

[5] While teachers of science subjects traditionally came to teaching through the consecutive model, in more recent years a large number of teachers of science subjects qualify through a concurrent course, at the University of Limerick. Teachers of Physical Education, Materials Technology (Wood) and Materials Technology (Metal) also qualify through a concurrent form of teacher education at UL.

have the statistics.'[6] Asked to expand on this perspective, Looney offers two reasons for these views. Firstly, 'Their initial teacher education was a bit of a TY anyway. So they have had that experience themselves of connecting stuff up.' Her second reason relates to subject hierarchy. She refers to 'body, food and soul subjects' as being low down on the subject hierarchy: 'Home Economics is low down the pecking order because it's a girls' subject; Religion is peripheral. So is PE.' Teachers of these subjects, she believes, 'were never in the high stakes zone anyway, so they could always experiment and innovate'.

John MacGabhann also sees the relative power of different subject domains within the staffroom as inhibiting integration and balance within TY. He is not shy about identifying culprits:

> I suspect that in a majority of schools certain subjects which have always had primacy continue to have primacy, so the subject department distorts or contorts TY by insisting, in effect, that TY should operate as the first of three years towards the Leaving Certificate. I would say that is particularly true of subjects like Maths. In fact, I would say that Maths is the single subject that most perversely affects the TY.

He suggests that Mathematics teaching itself loses out. He contends that it is less well taught and less well learned in TY than if the subject was asked to play a more significant role 'in bringing to bear a more critical and evaluative perspective[7]'. He thinks that there is a paralytic effect:

> Because there seems to be an abject fear - an irrational fear - that somehow or another students will lose the thread if, for a brief period of time, they are let sample other ways of doing and, most particularly, other ways of thinking. I actually think Maths suffers.

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[6] There does not seem to be comprehensive statistics in any database on the subject backgrounds of TY co-ordinators. In the TYCSS (2000b) survey, the subjects most frequently taught were English and Maths. They were followed by History, Irish, Geography, Business and French. A smaller number of co-ordinators taught RE, HE, Technology and PE. This author's recollection of the 68 teachers selected in late 1993 to spearhead the in-career programme to accompany the national mainstreaming of TY is that less than ten came from a concurrent initial education background. Two of the 14 members of the TYST (1995–1998) had come to teaching via concurrent initial teacher education. Twelve had not.

[7] Recent research into the teaching of Mathematics in Irish post-primary schools (Lyons *et al*, 2003) using video technology offers valuable insights into how the subject is constructed.

However, beyond subject hierarchies, he returns to a central issue concerning TY: teachers' beliefs. He says that, irrespective of what teachers may say, as he puts it 'in conclave', if they are not individually convinced of the merit of TY, then within an individual classroom 'they can revert to the tried and the trusted if not the good'. He thinks that this is frequently the case with continuity subjects. Consequently, students experience them as quite similar to what they encounter in other years.

'The academic component' is a phrase that often connotes concern if not reservations about or even resistance to TY. In staffroom debates this phrase, especially if juxtaposed with the image of TY as 'a doss year', captures a real axis of tension. Recalling her memories of TY's early development, Mary McGlynn, NAPD, remembers: 'One of the big worries early on was: how do we keep the rigour, the academic and intellectual rigour?' She was a teacher of languages at the time and very aware that 'You can't drop the language for the year because you are going to go backwards very rapidly at that learning stage when you still haven't a command of the language.'

McGlynn thinks that in the early days some teachers were 'so cautious that we were afraid to move from what was seen as hard core material' - the latter term acting as a code for staying close to eLC syllabi. This perspective, she says, dampened down creativity, excitement or lateral thinking in designing TY subjects. Furthermore, teachers' preparation was limited. They were used to 'in-service that dealt with a specific syllabus and a specific course'. In those pioneering days, as she saw them, engaging students in TY depended greatly on individual teachers' imagination and their personalities.

Unevenness and fragmentation

TY depends on 'bottom-up' innovation, where teachers have to work together to develop their own programmes within the broad parameters of the *Guidelines*. Some interviewees emphasise the unevenness of the quality of the learning experiences within any one school. Moira Leyden, ASTI, stressed the importance of teamwork among

teachers for a high quality programme. Where this is absent there can be a perception among students that it's not 'thought through to the end' and this can contribute to a fragmented view of TY. She attributes lack of teamwork to a failure at the 'school management level in terms of allocating teachers to the programme team', rather than anything within the structure of TY.

As indicated in the school profiles, even in schools were TY is well regarded, it can be perceived as more fragmented than integrated. Eamon Stack's view of an integrated programme is: 'I think that is a difficult one. To ensure balance is important. That is a particularly difficult one.' Like Mary McGlynn, he looks back to the earlier days of TY. He estimates that 'it was attempting to ride a number of horses at the same time'. He cites the *Guidelines* (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c) and recalls that the Department was anxious to ensure that TY would not be 'subsumed by schools into a third year of the Leaving Cert.'. He points out that this was at a time of major expansion of TY provision. In his opinion:

> Since then most schools have learned how to handle TY and can, generally, be trusted with TY. While the Leaving Cert. is still 'high stakes' it is less high stakes than it was, so it should be easier now for schools to provide a TY programme as intended.

He says he would like to see TY 'being less dependent on the continuation' but notes that 'there are a number of conflicting objectives here and they have to be met'. He cites 'concerns that parents would have is that they (students) would lose the habit of studying and so on'. Consequently, 'In TY a school cannot abandon everything that went before it and hope to pick it up afterwards.'

Perceptions of students' attitudes

The first part of the research supplies evidence that many of the 111 students who were interviewed demonstrate positive attitudes to TY. Often, they contrasted their TY experience with those in third year, fifth year and sixth year. JC and eLC programmes were often described as pressurised and stressful. Some described TY as a 'break'- a period of 'recovery' after the JC examination.

The researcher believes that this striking contrast highlights some tensions and paradoxes associated with TY. He believes that the explanations offered by policymakers and leaders of educational interest groups to this phenomenon might throw some further light on how they regard TY..

While not quite challenging the findings, John MacGabhann, TUI, is keenly aware of the optional nature of TY. He adds: 'TY is often a preserve of a particular group. It is often the preserve of the committed or the enthusiastic or the motivated student.' He believes that the perceived 'break with routine' contributes to TY's popularity with these students. MacGabhann believes that the possibility of negotiating some of the learning in TY contributes to its popularity with students.

He also believes that the modular structure of some TY programmes; the possibility of sampling subjects; the provision of learning activities 'beyond the norm'; and the more intimate involvement by students in designing learning that's important to them, contribute to their greater engagement and positive disposition.

Anne Looney, NCCA, also focuses on the absence of examination pressure in TY. She believes that while TY's learning goals fit into a continuum of experience from first year to sixth year, TY is experienced very differently: 'For most kids it looks completely different from the rest of school largely because of this standing out … from the certificate exams.'

As well as the absence of public examinations contributing to students' enthusiasm for TY, Anne Looney suggests that TY's well defined identity as a programme is a further positive. There is very little sense of the JC, for example, as a single learning entity, she asserts. She also believes that when students have a good experience it impacts on them personally and this heightens their enthusiasm: 'I think if they had a positive experience of it (TY) they do see it as offering them something personal.'

She believes that students tend to highlight the once-off learning experiences rather than what is regular and associated with subjects, echoing, to some extent, Eamon Stack's 'week on week' point; John MacGabhann's view of the 'break from routine'; and Sinéad Breathnach's belief that enthusiasm is frequently related to the outer layer of the TY 'onion' (Jeffers, 2007a, p. 265). The outer layer includes once-off events and specific TY modules, as opposed to sampling new subjects or engaging with continuity subjects.

Michael Garvey, SLSS, sees the 'more mature and more democratic relationship' between students and teachers as a reason why TY students – and those following LCA and LCVP – report enthusiasm for these programmes.

Éilis Humphreys, LDS, believes that, for many students, their own decision to freely choose TY predisposes them to an enthusiastic attitude. Furthermore, exercising choices is a feature that runs through TY. Students can often choose particular modules and subjects. Sometimes they have an input into designing the programme or negotiating the learning with particular teachers and there are also wider choices regarding project and assignment tasks and work experience placements. Secondly, from her reading of the research data sent to her in advance of the interview, she thinks that students' perceptions 'that they are more listened to' in TY is significant. Thirdly, she identifies the social dimension in TY as leading to a positive dynamic. She mentions outdoor pursuits as well as the musical and numerous trips 'on the bus' as events that students view enthusiastically. All of these factors contribute, she contends, to a greater sense of what she calls 'personalised learning'. She explains this as not so much IEPs (Individual Education Programmes) that have become associated with learners with 'special' needs, but rather as students having a greater sense that courses are designed with their needs in mind – rather than the needs of the system, the economy or the society – and that their individuality is more respected.

Referring to her experience in two different schools, Humphreys' comments also confirm improved student–student relationships and improved student–teacher relationships as a significant outcome of TY. She remarks:

'So many TY students will say that the teachers treated them differently or they got on much better with the teachers in TY.'

Sinéad Breathnach, SDPI, points out that many students frequently report positive experiences in first year of the Junior Cycle as well as in TY. Like Anne Looney, she suggests that this points to exam pressure being a restricting force in other years. She adds, 'But I think also that teaching and learning methodologies play an awfully strong role.'

The perception voiced by a number of students in the first part of the research that teachers 'are different' in TY, finds many echoes among policy makers and shapers. Recalling her experiences as a teacher of English in TY, Anne Looney adds that she is very aware that both students and teachers remark that, compared to other years, especially examination classes, teachers 'behave differently' in TY. John MacGabhann believes that: 'Without question, teachers allow themselves latitude during TY that they are professionally afraid to allow themselves during the years that lead to public examinations.' Sinead Breathnach remarks that many teachers feel constrained (in other years) so that the demands of the examinations lead their teaching. They teach to the test. Sometimes this is in response to what they perceive as the expectations of parents.

 Sinéad Breathnach also believes that the discourse on TY as 'different' needs more interrogation. She remarks:

> In a lot of the literature the emphasis is on TY as being significantly different. Rather than this being something admirable in TY, I think it is, in many ways, a criticism of the rest of the experience at second-level.

Marian Lyon, NPCpp, also considers that explanations for students' enthusiasm can be found in the range of teaching methodologies employed in TY:

> Students are turned off by the traditional style of teaching and learning. Our students are force-fed information and knowledge and asked to regurgitate it at exam time. They readily admit that they lose all of that after the exams are over and the kids will tell you that within a year after the Leaving Cert. they have lost most of it. TY allows students to challenge those traditional ways of teaching and learning. It allows them to become creators of their

own knowledge through activity-based learning, all of the group work, the use of ICT, discussions, debates and all of those ways of teaching and learning that they engage in during TY.

This approach towards independent learning, according to Lyon, is propelled by interaction with the local community, visiting speakers from NGOs and excursions outside the classroom. Such activities reinforce students' sense of being treated as young adults with an interest in the society around them. Like Éilis Humphreys and Anne Looney, she reckons that they experience TY as more personally relevant. She suggests that TY's timing resonates well with adolescent development:

They often become very passionate about causes that they first encountered when they were in TY. That can lead them on to become volunteers within their community and so on, (engage with) special causes, social issues and so on.

As regards the pressure of examinations, Lyon adds a further perspective:

Of course, having just completed the Junior Cert. they welcome the release from the pressure of exams. They know they have two long hard years ahead of them and, by God, they are going to enjoy that TY and make the most of it.

The sense of engagement is also picked up by Mary McGlynn, NAPD, who believes that from a student's point of view, 'maybe there is much more enjoyment about the kind of learning taking place in TY than there is in other areas'. She sees the practical, activity-orientated thrust of TY as especially engaging for students. She contrasts this with the more passive learning in other programmes.

Comments from Moira Leyden, ASTI, resonate with many of the views on students' enthusiasm for TY. She highlights activity-based learning, freedom from examination demands, opportunities to improve 'on weaker areas', and the social dimension. On the latter point she includes improved relationships between students themselves, particularly though group activities outside the classroom, and the development of more mature relationships between students and teachers.

Chief Inspector Eamon Stack focused on the very structured, centralised and defined nature of JC and eLC programmes and their predictability. As he sees it:

> The experiences of Junior Cert. and Leaving Cert. can be, to some extent, repetitive. It can be the same or a very similar experience week on week. In Transition Year it is not necessarily like that. I have heard many students talking about Transition Year and saying they have done things that they never thought they would ever do in school. All Junior Cert. students do more or less the same thing, as do Leaving Cert. students. I think that the variety that Transition Year brings to play gives students great enthusiasm for learning.

He suggests that the breadth of TY is what makes it different. Its exploratory and local nature adds to its immediacy and sense of relevance for students. He contrasts this with the eLC which, he says, 'is relevant for them going forward, though they may not see the immediate benefits'. Might this indicate that the exploratory and local dimensions of JC and eLC might be underdeveloped? His response is clear:

> Well, we don't want all programmes over the five–six years at second-level providing the exact same experience. The fact that you would have positive features in a particular programme doesn't mean they should or should not be in other programmes. We tend to design curriculum in this country in a very prescriptive way. Our teachers have come to expect this. We provide them with not only a curriculum but guidelines for the curriculum and in-service for the curriculum. By contrast, in many other jurisdictions they would simply issue or publish the objectives, the learning outcomes and the teacher has to do the rest.

While TY goes against the grain of this Irish tradition, Stack seems to suggest that he sees both approaches as valid and complementary: 'That contrast is what makes it interesting. It is not that we would have one instead of the other. Both approaches are valuable.'

As discussed later, this view is especially problematic when approximately half the relevant age cohort experiences TY while the other half does not.

Students' perception that TY is more relaxed than the rest of schooling is generally confirmed from this data. Both Éilis Humphreys and Moira Leyden link students' enthusiasm to what they refer to as the 'fun' element of TY.

Like her trade union colleague John MacGabhann, Moira Leyden is keen to temper the point about students' enthusiasm with a reminder that not all students follow the TY programme. She points to the existence of a spectrum of opinion among students and their parents in relation to the merit of TY, including those who take a pragmatic, instrumental view of schooling, preferring a five-year cycle, and who make comments such as: 'I want to go straight on and get my Leaving Cert. and go to college.' She acknowledges that the issue of the quality of the TY programme in an individual school is also a factor in influencing uptake among students. She regards such comments about TY being 'badly run' as 'unconsidered' and asserts that:

> Whether it is badly run or not, maybe they are not the best people to judge. Maybe they feel there is not enough learning or maybe they feel there is too much emphasis on the non-academic or whatever.

TABLE 6.1 SUMMARY OF EXPLANATIONS OFFERED BY POLICY MAKERS AND SHAPERS AS TO WHY STUDENTS ARE ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT TY

Breadth and variety of learning experiences	Absence of public examinations	Negotiated learning
Opportunities to sample subjects	Modular structure	Teachers are more relaxed
More personally relevant	TY has a clear identity –JC and eLC often experienced as a series of subjects	More varied teaching and learning methodologies
Students often make a particular choice to do TY (where optional).	Break with routine	More mature and democratic relationships between students and teachers
Learning experiences more personally relevant	Students feel a greater sense of agency.	Experience of active and experiential learning experiences inside and outside classrooms
TY had more 'fun'.		Opportunities to improve on 'weaker' areas
Comments tempered by reminders that TY is not followed by the full cohort.		

Learning beyond the classroom

Learning beyond the conventional 40-minute class emerges from the research as a distinct and popular features of TY. The term 'learning beyond the classroom' (Jeffers, 2007b, p. 3) has been used to depict a range of active learning activities (some of which

take place within classrooms), including work experience and work shadowing, community service, field trips, social surveys, outdoor pursuits, mini-companies, working with NGOs, inviting visitors to the classroom, etc. In some schools such activities are arranged on a subject-specific basis and referred to as 'significant learning days'.[8]

Attitudes among policy shapers and makers regarding 'learning beyond the classroom' draw attention to some sharply different opinions. One view is that, while appropriate in TY, more 'learning beyond the classroom' is not particularly needed across the other five years. An alternative position is that not only is more needed in JC and eLC, but that because of the activities in TY, there is a reduced sense of urgency about including more 'learning beyond the classroom' in these programmes. One consequence of the latter view is that, because not all students follow TY, significant numbers of young people are denied such learning experiences. The 'academic' view of the eLC, and to a lesser extent the JC, is compounded, and the perception of TY as 'a parallel universe', distinct and different from the rest of schooling, is underlined.

Moira Leyden, ASTI, is an enthusiastic advocate of learning beyond the classroom: 'I think that the experiences and the self-confidence that young people get from working outside the school – the formal school building environment – as part of learning, are absolutely invaluable to them. It stands to them for life.'

When asked about learning beyond the classroom, Eamon Stack's response was to focus on the possibilities outside traditional classes but still within the physical structure of the school:

> I would like to see more learning within the school as distinct from within the classroom. We can open up a lot of opportunities here. We do not have to send everybody out of the school to increase the learning; we can bring more people in. We could have more shared and team teaching within the school.

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[8] See Doyle *et al.* (1994) *TY Resource Material,* Section 1, Planning, p. 16

He cites some of the obstacles TY co-ordinators regularly face when organising 'beyond the classroom' activities and sees potential within school buildings: 'I think we can find more ways of creating learning experiences within schools and linking with the community.' Invited to give examples of such experiences, he suggests guidance and counselling as one obvious area.

> For example, we know that we have the challenge of encouraging more people to study science and engineering and so on. There may be a lack of clarity or tangibility about some of these jobs. A way of improving that situation would be for students to be given a better understanding of exactly what engineers and computer scientists do by having such people in the school on a regular basis. This is indeed happening in some schools. I am also talking about other things, including social issues. Schools have growing contacts now with many external bodies. For example, in the case of special education needs there are more linkages with the HSE and so on. Schools are changing. In the context of the actual learning within schools, I would like to see more teachers in a subject area having more engagement with more classes in a more informal way rather than just within the structured timetable.

The notion of the eLC, in particular, being resistant to change is emphasised by John MacGabhann, TUI. He cites the example of relationships and sexuality education. He juxtaposes the SPHE programme in first, second, and third year with the senior-cycle level, where, he believes, 'you have absolutely nothing provided that would increase the personal competence and the personal confidence and assertiveness of students.'

His development of this point resonates with Anne Looney's, NCCA, suggestion that TY may be letting the eLC 'off the hook' so that it can concentrate on 'its core business':

> … and everybody says, 'well, let's have a Transition Unit about that'. It is a back-handed compliment, because it is a recognition that such is required and that TY can accommodate such things that are important. But we haven't yet broken through the barrier of allowing that such things could actually be more important than some of the other things that we provide for Leaving Cert.

As may be becoming clear, the eLC as the shadow under which TY has to exist is a persistent theme.

Participants' perceptions of TY in the context of 6 years of schooling

As the previous section demonstrates, there is considerable enthusiasm for TY among these policy shapers and policy makers. However, reservations – the 'but…' often implied throughout the discourse – invariably applies to the existing highly structured, centralised and exam-focused eLC and JC. These dominant programmes are, almost unceasingly, the reference point for TY. While there is some acknowledgement that TY's influence seeps beyond the confines of 4th year - especially regarding student-teacher relationships at 5th and 6th year (Jeffers, 2007a, p 257) – the restricting reality coming the other way is very powerful. As with the personnel in the schools, the attempts of policy shapers and policy makers to reconcile TY with the other programmes is fraught with tension. The metaphors they allude to are instructive.

John MacGabhann, TUI, believes that TY is a time when 'the rope is loosened as far as they (students) are concerned'. He adds:

> There is an acceptance in schools that TY operates differently. Noise is deemed to be constructive when it's heard from TY groups. When it is heard from other groups it is deemed to be an obstruction. It is negatively perceived.

MacGabhann also recognises that after TY, students can expect to return to a much tighter regime: 'If it (TY) has worked well within a school, it has probably provided outlets for those students to do what they haven't been able to do previously and probably won't be let do again.' Implicit in many of the comments is the view that established programmes, such as the JC and eLC, do not engage students sufficiently because of their rigidity, predictability, passivity and lack of imagination.

Sometimes, if one listens carefully that what is being said, the unspoken context is the JC/eLC exam-focused regime. For example, Éilis Humphreys, LDS, says that in schools where TY is optional, 'the relationship of teachers with the students who have done TY is different. You can sense it. They are treating them more like adults.' She also suggests that what she calls 'the fun element' needs to be recorded and that there are increased opportunities for various forms of achievement: 'So there is a celebration of

success. And there is a sense of pride because they take part in all those types of activities, more so than they do in other years. And that permeates. It gives a lift.'

Of course, the relationships between TY and eLC/JC are not totally oppositional. For Éilis Humphreys, there is growing evidence of how TY assists students in choosing eLC subjects. She also highlights the benefits of programmes such as paired-reading programmes where TY students work with second year students. This development of different relationships across the school manifests itself very positively, she says, at the level of the Students' Council.

Mary McGlynn, NAPD, contends that the contrast between TY and established programmes was much more pronounced in the 1970s and 1980s. She cites practical work in eLC History, eLC Geography, the new RE syllabus and the growth of project work at JC level as evidence of progress. Her focus on more practical and project work resonates with comments made by John MacGabhann, TUI. Referring to the longitudinal studies by the NCCA – *Moving Up* (Smyth *et al.,* 2004) and *Pathways through the Junior Cycle* (Smyth *et al.,* 2006)[9] – he notes that:

> … subjects that involve practical application are the subjects that students across the ability ranges favour most – where they construct their own learning or they are active in the construction of both the teaching methodology and of the learning outcome.

He is critical of the way the system consigns students to learn – and teachers to teach – in ways that 'clearly are of less benefit than other ways that are available'.

Mary McGlynn, NAPD, expands on her use of the phrase 'outside the box' by referring to the 'box' as the physical classroom and the constraints of class periods of 40 or 45 minutes' duration. TY activities seem to involve more movement inside and outside classrooms, where the challenges are physical as well as mental and intellectual. With the established JC and eLC, the demands are much more to be sitting, receptively, in the classroom 'box', she says.

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[9] The third book in this series, *Gearing Up for the Exam?* (Smyth *et al.,* 2007) was published subsequent to these interviews.

Echoing Eamon Stack's observation that TY is more 'student-centred', Michael Garvey, SLSS, believes that 'newer' programmes such as TY, JCSP, LCVP and LCA are more in tune with the concept of 'lifelong learning' than the more traditional ones. In these programmes there is, he believes:

> … a fundamental goal of empowering the students themselves to take a fuller role in their own learning. That takes you into preparing students for lifelong learning which must be central to any decent education. I don't think that goal is as powerfully expressed in the Junior Cycle and the established Leaving Certificate. But it is a fundamental part of the TY experience and, indeed, of the other two Senior Cycle programmes.

Anne Looney, NCCA, indicates that, from her contact with school personnel, TY struggles to stay on the agenda: 'I think it still gets boxed in so you don't hear it discussed.' The only time she hears it being discussed in a wide context is when something new comes up. People say: 'can we do that in TY?' She also observes that in some schools 'the TY classrooms were together at the end of a corridor', keeping the 'extra noise, colour and posters' at a distance.

There is a growing sense – also evident in the data from schools – of TY as a sort of 'parallel universe', separate and distinct from the JC/eLC.

Sinéad Breathnach, SDPI, captures the problem of the parallel universe phenomenon when she remarks:

> … one concern in talking about TY being ring-fenced is that, in practice, in some settings, that can mean that it's a kind of ghetto that doesn't relate to what goes before or what comes after. When TY is over you have teachers going into fifth year – and I am deliberately exaggerating here – saying: 'You can forget all about that nonsense now, we are down to the Leaving Cert. and this is the serious work that we have to do.'

Moira Leyden wonders whether the current message to young people is something like the following: 'We can allow you to "play around with" learning out in the community and enterprise education and all of that in TY but you have to get down to the real business of preparing for exams after that.'

She also suggests that the school system fails to harness learning opportunities within students' own ambit of experience. She recalls an ESRI report indicating that 'something like 83 per cent' of Senior Cycle students engage in part-time jobs.[10] She contends: 'This is incredible experiential learning. I don't think we are doing half enough to bring back students' insights and skills from their work environments into schools.'

Thinking within the DES is illuminated by some of Eamon Stack's comments. Recalling the origins of TY and the LCA, he indicates that tensions seem inevitable:

> There is more focus in both of those programmes on the student. The traditional Leaving Cert. is focused on the subjects but TY is more student-centred. The Leaving Cert. Applied is also very student centred … The obvious difference is that the Leaving Cert. Applied has an examination at the end of it, but, significantly, is ring-fenced away from any points race in order to keep as high a value as possible on the learning experiences of the students.

In his opinion, the practice in some schools of asking students to make a choice to do TY, if they wish to do an established eLC, or LCA is 'an unintended consequence'. However, he doesn't see it totally in negative terms:

> The positive side of it is that it shows schools are thinking about what experiences the students are getting. The schools are feeling: 'We can get the bulk of the experiences that you might get in TY for a particular group in a Leaving Cert. Applied.' How bad is that?

The idea of a parallel universe is further illuminated by Anne Looney, NCCA, when discussing 'learning beyond the classroom'. She remarked:

> … the fact of the matter is that, because we have TY, the pressure to put that (kind of learning experience) into Junior Cert. and Leaving Cert. doesn't exist. Arguably, if we didn't have TY there might be greater pressure (to do this). But because we have TY – even though it doesn't get to everybody – you don't have that same pressure at all.

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[10] This refers to *At Work in School: part-time employment among second-level students* (2006), Selina McCoy and Emer Smyth, ESRI/Liffey Press.

Looney adds that in her contact with counterparts in curriculum agencies in other countries, she is aware of the pressure on them to introduce more 'learning outside the classroom' and to increase interaction with local communities into schools. There isn't that pressure in Ireland, she says, 'that all happens in TY'.

In this view, TY's parallel universe serves to further consolidate and make legitimate the JC/eLC *status quo.*

Anne Looney believes that many teachers view TY as a legitimate site for pedagogical innovation but that 'you can't do it anywhere else' because of the exams. In that sense she proposes that TY might be seen as a negative force. Is she saying that TY inhibits innovation in Junior Cycle and in Leaving Cert?

> I think having the TY there actually allows for it to become a focus of pressures that otherwise would be on the Junior Cert. or Leaving Cert. It means that all of that pressure is redirected. We have TY, so everything that we need to do, we can do there – without messing with the core business of post-primary education which, obviously, is the selection and sorting of students going to university. So you can do all of those extra things in the TY without departing, in the words of *Star Trek,* from the prime directive, which is to sort people out for university. I think that is a very powerful force in post-primary schools.

If what she says is valid, there are very serious learning implications for students who don't do TY. She agrees that there are: 'huge and increasing implications for students who don't do TY'.

Overall, these policy shapers and makers acknowledge –sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly – a lack of coherence between the various second-level programmes. One consequence is to view TY as a 'parallel universe', significantly disconnected from what goes before or comes after. Furthermore, despite voicing enthusiasm for TY's aspirations and even achievements, the force of exam-focused teaching and learning to marginalise TY is powerful.

Timetabling

JC/eLC hegemony is manifest quite starkly when TY timetables are analysed. As seen in the data from the four schools, some imaginative re-structuring of the school year, for example, modules that rotate every ten weeks, contrasts with quite a traditional adherence to 40-minute periods within weekly timetables.

For Mary McGlynn, NAPD, timetabling is at the heart not just of a school's TY programme, but of its whole operation:

> I would love to have a debate with schools about timetabling. I mean timetabling is the mechanism by which you carry out the philosophy of teaching and learning you have. I would always say to a school 'give me your timetable' – whatever aspirations are made or whatever things are said about ethos or anything else – 'let me have a look at your timetable, let me have a look at how you rate your religious education or your PE or whatever.' That is all I need actually to see the philosophy of the school in action.

Recalling her experience as a school Principal, Sinéad Breathnach, SDPI, believes that the key to successful timetabling is 'an awful lot of flexibility'. In TY, for example, schools need to be open to a day or a half-day that can be dedicated to a particular learning activity, either inside or outside the school building. Flexibility is endorsed by Mary McGlynn who adds the caveat that one needs to be careful about arrangements that might be 'too loose … you can't have too much wandering around, unsupervised, unstructured.'

During her time as a school Principal, Éilis Humphreys, LDS, had given timetabling questions considerable thought. She points to her school's extensive use of double and triple periods in their TY programme. They experimented with hour-long periods as she was attracted by the opportunities it gave teachers to be adventurous and how it supported activity-based learning. Teachers of French and German, for example, were enthusiastic. 'But I know not all our teachers would agree. They might find it difficult or challenging to keep students on task or to keep them motivated (for more than 40 minutes).'

Mary McGlynn, NAPD, observes a timetabling trend towards days with a minimum of nine periods. She wonders about 'the physical and mental toll on people of that kind of constant changing'. She implies that such thinking is part of a wider malaise. 'I feel with the Senior Cycle that we are not really addressing how students learn, and how they might best learn, and giving them responsibility for their own learning.'

Sinéad Breathnach thinks that, to some extent, teachers are entrenched in the 40-minute period. She develops this point:

> Moving out of it can be difficult. There are reasons to think that a longer period at Senior Cycle would be appropriate. I know that there have been experiments with an hour-long period and having subjects fewer times a week and so on.

Sinéad Breathnach accepts that a 40-minute class period – which, in practice. often means 30–35 minutes of 'learning time' – is especially restrictive for active learning[11] approaches. In her work in a variety of roles, Breathnach has from time to time had occasion to analyse timetables and she has been struck by the rigidity and lack of imagination of a few that she has come across. She cites pre-determined sets of optional subjects with very little flexibility or an unbalanced distribution of classes across the week. Such instances, rare though they may be, seem to her like 'lazy timetabling'.

Michael Garvey, SLSS, sees the 40-minute class period as 'almost set in stone'. He advocates extensions of learning time for particular activities, but rejects the notion that 'active learning may require more time. He says: if you need more time for it, well, sorry, it's not there!

In addition to a lack of imagination, Breathnach senses that in some schools, historically, traditions had developed that timetables were constructed primarily around the strengths and qualifications of the available teachers. She describes the pragmatic view that says: 'This is the make-up of our staff and these are the subjects they are

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[11] Theorists on active and experiential learning, for example Kolb (1984), assert that reflection or debriefing is critically important if the learning is to be maximised. Ideally, this reflection should take place immediately after the activity.

qualified to teach, so, regardless of what the students actually want or need to do, we set up the timetable this way because these are the teachers we have.' She adds, 'I thought this was on the way out so I am surprised when it comes to my attention.'

Mary McGlynn, NAPD, returns to the need for more debate about learning styles at Junior and Senior Cycle. She thinks that the suggestion of de-coupling Junior and Senior Cycle may have merit, though 'I don't have the answers but I certainly find myself raising the questions.'

Thus, timetabling is offered as a specific issue that illustrates how TY can be hemmed in by existing structures and practices. The underlying thrust of freedom and flexibility within TY does not always get translated into the weekly timetable. On the other hand there is some evidence that the TY experience is challenging some policy makers and shapers to question some dominant features of existing school cultures– in this case the 35/40 minute class period. Similar tense relations between the values of TY and rest of schooling emerge from the interviews in relation to assessment, with a number of the informants seeing TY as an important site for developing more varied approaches to assessment.

How participants see the their own agencies supporting TY

Enthusiasm for the idea of TY, tempered by its context of being sandwiched between JC and eLC programmes is also evident in how informants see their own agency's role of supporting TY. Further tensions are evident as, despite some very practical supports for TY, there is also a trend evident in this section of TY being continually in danger of getting pushed to the periphery –sometimes inadvertently - because of larger system concerns.

Whole School Evaluation (WSE) in the DES

When the Department of Education and Science decided to publish the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) reports on its website (http://www.education.ie) in June 2006 it was regarded as a major cultural change in schooling in Ireland[12]. Chief Inspector Eamon Stack spearheaded the WSE project, and his initial reaction in the interview was to underplay what has been achieved and suggest that more vigorous evaluations are in the pipeline. 'WSE is in its infancy … Actually it is work in progress.'

He points out that, so far, WSE has focused on five broad areas of school organisation[13] and that, as yet, the Inspectorate has not been able to look at specific programmes such as TY. He indicates that change is coming:

> Our evaluations now have a pre-planning phase through our Evaluation Support and Research Unit. We have already devised the various templates for evaluating all the impacts of a TYP in a school. This has been trialled already in a number of schools. We will be factoring that in and we will be doing evaluations of TY from September '07 onwards.

Having read the recently published reports, the researcher formed the opinion that there was 'some irritation with the absence of written TY programmes'. 'That is a fair comment', according to the Chief Inspector. He was not so sure that the more recent reports were 'more robust' and asked for an example. In the report for Ramsgrange Community School, Co. Wexford, inspectors reported on the need for 'a root and branch review of TY'. Eamon Stack responded: 'We would have said that two years ago if we were in the same school or in any other school with the same situation.' The inspectors reported that in St Wolstan's Community School, Celbridge, Co. Kildare, TY 'was more system-focused than driven by students needs'. That sounds like a 'stinging indictment'. Eamon Stack's response is instructive: 'My concern is that if it's fair and

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[12] The first school inspection reports were published on the Department's website on 22 June 2006 and 'hits' on the DES website, normally estimated to be about 4,000 per day, jumped to 40,000 on that day, causing the site to crash. (see: 'Department fails test as website crashes', *Irish Times,* 23 June 2006.)

[13] The sub-headings used in the WSE reports are: quality of school management; quality of school planning;quality of curriculum provision; quality of learning and teaching in subjects and quality of support for pupils..

reasonable, if it's a fair comment, that is the acid test. I don't think the school had any issue with that in the cold light of day.'[14]

Eamon Stack is generally wary about attaching too much significance to TY-related comments in WSE reports, nervous of making generalisations with a relatively small sample of schools. He would like more evidence: 'I would like to see that we would look, as we did in 1995,[15] in a more detailed way, in a different way, looking at TY *per se,* asking the same questions, in different schools.'

Parents' attitudes – National Parents' Council, post primary (NPCpp)

Following the publication of *Developing Senior Cycle* (NCCA, 2002)*,* the NCCA and the NPCpp organised a number of public consultations to elicit parents' views on the proposed changes. According to Marion Lyon, NPCpp, opinions were wide-ranging and TY was central to many of the discussions. She added that her comments in the interview attempted to reflect both the consensus and the conflict that emerged from those deliberations, in particular what had been presented in an internal NPCpp document, *The Voice of Parents.* On the positive side, she thinks it important to mention parents' appreciation of TY's freedom and flexibility, the resultant maturity, the development of life-skills, particularly communication skills, and the development of social consciousness. Most parents, she stresses, are keen to see their children volunteering for community involvement and civic participation.

She tempers this enthusiasm by noting that parents also acknowledge that these outcomes depend very much 'on the students' commitment to the programme'.

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[14] Some months after the publication of the WSE, the Board Of Management of St. Wolstan's responded to the DES. The response is very 'welcoming' of the evaluation. The response, available on the DES website, also states: 'The comments in relation to the Transition Year Programme do not reflect the commitment, competence and focus of the existing offering and those providing it. Comments were made on time-tabling without the time-tabling co-ordinator having been consulted or interviewed'.

[15] Inspectors, working in pairs, visited 144 schools in March 1995 to inspect TY programmes. A report, including specific recommendations, *Transition Year Programme 1994-95, An Evaluation by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education*, was published in February 1996 and was front page news in the *Irish Times*, 14 February 1996, under the headline 'Department tells 10% of secondary schools to improve their TY programmes'.

Particular parents may be very appreciative of TY's educational possibilities, she observes, but that is no guarantee that their children will even opt for TY or, if they do, engage with an open-minded disposition. Furthermore, there were specific concerns.

First, she refers to what she calls the 'unequal provision; that the TY is different from school to school, parents generally do not at all like that'.[16] Parents also have issues about 'the standard and quality of various programmes in schools'. Parents feel that all students should get the same experience, she says.

A very specific criticism from parents refers to a perception that 'the innovative and creative ideas and activities' occur in the early part of TY, that there is then a drop-off and that TY becomes 'not too different' from the other programmes. Lyon adds:

> It all goes back to quality. A majority of parents have concerns about allowing TY to be used as an academic year, as a means to a three-year Leaving Certificate. This is not favoured by parents and you might find that surprising. You might think that some parents would see it as a great bonus but that is not the case. Parents are of the view, and I quote, 'that TY needs structure, uniformity and definition of what needs to be achieved in the year'.

She comments that it's not clear whether parents are saying that they don't know about TY themselves or that they want its purposes made more explicit at individual school level – probably a bit of both. She indicates that for many parents 'the cost of TY is a problem'. She regards this as a major issue, especially in the context of social exclusion. She notes that 'The cost can be quite a high cost, depending on which school you go to. It was felt that ability to pay should not be allowed as a consideration for participation.'

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[16] Marion Lyon expanded extensively on this question of 'unequal provision' and it emerges as an umbrella term that covers a variety of issues. Parents regularly hear about programmes in other schools and 'wonder why they can't have them'. She cites a module in Legal Studies that schools have to 'buy in'. Not all schools have the same resources or wish to ask parents to pay extra. She mentions sports coaching as another area where uneven provision occurs and it may well be linked to cost. She nuances these remarks by saying that sometimes the actual costs of TY may not be as great as some parents think but 'this myth has blown up about the costs involved (in TY)'. She adds that 'some parents have a reluctance to pay for anything when it comes to education'. Schools' varied experience of curriculum development is also a contributory factor in the 'unequal provision', she says. While there is some 'unequal provision' between schools in relation to the LC, her central point regarding TY seems to be the extent of the variation and that this is often tied to charging students extra for particular activities or modules.

Lyon also says that many parents' dissatisfaction about being informed about TY centres on the 'information night', which is often held when students are in third year. 'If you don't get along to that one night, there is so much you miss.' She would like to see more brochures and DVDs about TY made available to parents and students, adding that the DES could do a lot more to inform parents about 'what goes on in our schools'. Allied to a lack of basic information about TY, Marion Lyon also states that parents are unhappy about the limited 'student, parental and community involvement in designing the programmes at school level'. A particular dimension of community engagement is 'work experience' and she indicates that parents, while appreciating its many benefits, can have a range of questions about work experience. These can be regarding the difficulties faced by some schools in arranging placements, differences between work experience and work shadowing, and payment for work experience. Linked to these concerns can be a worry among some parents that their sons or daughters encounter some financial independence during TY and then find it difficult to return 'to the old regime'.

Lyon believes that parents' lack of information about TY places them in an awkward position, especially in schools where TY is optional. In some schools she has no doubt that peer pressure and 'the folklore of the schoolyard' can conspire against young people taking up TY. In other cases, reservations may arise because of young peoples' natural impatience to 'move on'. She says:

> Kids are very much influenced by their peers and while we might think its parents who still have a certain influence – of course we do in many aspects of it – but there are many young people too who will want to get out of school as quickly as possible. I think we have to take account of that. Many of them will say: "What's the purpose, what's the reason? I want to – for many reasons – get finished in school; I want to go on to third level; I want to go to university, an institute or whatever; I want to do a trade; I want to do an apprenticeship and I really don't want to spend any more time at second level".'

Lyon concludes this catalogue of concerns by returning to the 'unequal provision', specifically the fact that it is compulsory in some schools, optional in others, and not on offer at all in another group of schools. Parents' views on this vary; some believe that

'TY should either be compulsory for all or done away with', while others feel that TY does not suit all students and should remain optional. Lyon's own view is that a majority of parents prefer TY as optional.

A central point in Lyon's interview, one she returns to again and again, is that 'parents have very little information', not just about TY, but about other aspects of schooling. 'How can parents be expected to appreciate the use of different teaching and learning methodologies, of new forms of assessment, unless they know what's going on?' she asks. In her opinion 'the support from parents (for TY) would be much greater' if they had the knowledge. She favours on-going dialogue between schools and parents, 'not simply a once-off information night'. She believes that at information sessions parents need to hear the voices of students who are in or who have completed TY.

These views from Marion Lyon, NPCpp, strongly substantiate the research finding in the first part of the research that parents have limited knowledge of TY and would welcome opportunities to learn more about it (Jeffers, 2007b, p. 4). The interview also reveals how informed parents' voices – silent for so long in educational debate – can be highly supportive of innovation.

Second-Level Support Service

Perhaps reflecting the history and evolution of the SLSS, Michael Garvey tended throughout the interview to refer to TY and the other Senior Cycle programmes, LCA and LCVP, as 'developments of the '90s'. There was a sense that these programmes had been introduced and were now firmly 'in-place' and that the locus of SLSS concern had shifted to a wider, whole-school focus. He made continual reference to its work of promoting mixed-ability teaching, co-operative learning, and strategies such as group work and peer work. He suggests that some teachers' openness to such possibilities is because of their experiences of LCVP, LCA, TY and JCSP. As regards specific support for TY, Garvey says that the SLSS does not have a lot of people working in this area. 'We have one national co-ordinator. Happily I have just managed to get another person appointed, so we will now have two full-time people from September on TY.'

He says that this came about 'after lots of knocking on the door'. He regards this development as the DES acknowledging that TY has been under-supported in recent years. He says that the SLSS has had to be strategic and has developed 'templates, strategies and frameworks' to assist schools in the design and evaluation of their TY programmes. He says: 'Those two areas, design and evaluation – both extremes on the loop if you like – is where most of our effort is going. That is the way it has to be because we are so thinly spread.'[17]

Garvey clarified that other SLSS personnel are only available for specific work related to TY on an irregular basis:

> But these people would never be available to go in and do whole-staff work related to TY. They would be available for occasional work – helping out at trade fairs, for example, which is a huge task, doing some work around the specific TY-related modular courses that we offer. They would help there. But in dealing with schools on a large scale, they are not available for that.

Asked if this means that there are two people to serve approximately 520 schools offering TY programmes, Garvey's response indicates further developments in thinking within the DES and SLSS regarding support for specific programmes:

> (There was) one person until recently, and he was able to draw on some other resources. Also, we have this policy of recruiting – tap on the shoulder method – large numbers of 'part-time associates'. Now these people we would take out for maybe two or three days in the year and offer them some planning time and some training time. They would be identified because they would be very good at what they do. We would employ those people locally to work with the education centres and to offer programmes, usually in the evening, around topics that would be of key or medium interest to TY co-ordinators. Those topics are generally around evaluation of the programme, writing the programme, re-writing the programme, bringing some innovation to the programme, keeping it alive - essentially refreshing it.

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[17] The 'loop' referred to here suggests reference to a circular model promoted by SDPI that involves 'Design, Implement, Evaluate, Review' in Government of Ireland, (1999) *School Development Planning, An Introduction for Second-Level Schools,* Dublin: Department of Education and Science.

In the data emerging from schools, teachers were sometimes critical of the approach that identifies TY co-ordinators as priority people for in-service support and neglects subject/module teachers. They sometimes point to the model of support for LCA where those teaching particular modules have been strongly supported and ask why teachers of TY don't get similar provision.

Garvey's response provides evidence of how thinking within the DES and SLSS positions support for subjects ahead of support for programmes:

> I recognise that it's a problem …We have been moving to address it … SLSS has got quite big now and we have biology, chemistry and physics within the frame. So we said let's see what TY and [the] sciences can do together. My perspective on it was: let's see what we do to support the sciences. Michael's (O'Leary – National Co-ordinator of TY) view was, let's see what we can do to support science teaching within TY.

Garvey explains that the outcome was to run a modular course on science at Senior Cycle in various education centres. He was very satisfied with that as it 'worked quite well. Teachers liked it. We filled every course.' He remarks that SLSS has just put 'a large Gaeilge team in place to support Gaeilge within the system'. He would like to think there would be a synergy between Gaeilge and TY. Similarly, he says, with English. He says that the challenge is to devise initiatives that link programme support with subject support.

He suggests that the work of the SLSS indicated that subject-specific teams were urgently needed. In relation to teachers of Gaeilge, for example, he said that they were 'despondent' and 'depressed' that 'there had been nothing offered for years'. He says that the SLSS made a similar case to the DES in relation to Mathematics at Senior Cycle. In both cases these subjects were, he says, 'in trouble'.

Throughout, Garvey is keen to highlight that, in addition to staff dedicated to specific programmes and subjects, SLSS also has 12 regional development officers (RDOs) whose sole focus is to develop 'a generic approach to supporting teaching and learning within their region'.

School Development Planning Initiative

Asked about specific support for TY that might come from the SDPI team, Sinéad
Breathnach points out that they would not be the 'first port of call'. From the outset of
mainstreaming, a school looking for focused support in relation to TY would call on the
support services for TY (TYST and TYCSS), now incorporated within the SLSS. If a
school was conducting, say, a whole school review of the curriculum, the SDPI would
be involved. She adds that the SDPI team are more often asked to facilitate a curriculum
review at Junior Cycle than at TY or Senior Cycle.

She points out that the SLSS has resources of personnel which 'far exceed those of the
School Development Planning Initiative'. She explains that, where provision is made
for the specific support of a programme, the DES policy is that schools be directed first
to 'the more focused forms of support'. However, she adds: 'That is not to say that we
haven't done some work in relation to Transition Year.' She cites a number of
examples. At subject department planning meetings within a school, discussion of
appropriate teaching and learning methodologies in TY would be one area that SDPI
encounters. The model of evaluation promoted by TYST (Doyle *et al.* 1994), including
consultation with parents and students, is held up by the SDPI as 'a model of good
practice', not only for TY but for other aspects of school life. She also emphasises that
the SDPI attempts to get across the notion of coherence within schools, trying to get
away 'from the notion that you have a whole lot of little bits that have no connection
with each other'. Using the analogy of a jigsaw, she says that the SDPI approach is to
invite schools 'to see how TY fits within the bigger picture and how it is contributing to
students'.

In their dealings with a school that has a five-year cycle, for example, and does not offer
TY, would SDPI see it as part of its function to suggest that they consider TY? Sinéad
Breathnach emphasises that the SDPI is not intended to prescribe an agenda of priorities
for the school but to facilitate the school in identifying its own priorities in the light of
the developing needs of its community. The cue for topics comes very much from the
Principal of the school. She adds that in the above situation, they might 'drop pebbles in
the water', posing questions such as 'what steps have you taken to identity the needs of

your students?' and 'how can you meet them better than you are meeting them at the moment?'

Asked specifically if the SDPI has a policy in relation to TY, her response is clear and direct: 'No, we don't have a policy in relation to the promotion of Transition Year.'

Pursuit of this point elicits a clarification between a school not offering SPHE at Junior Cycle and a school not offering TY. Breathnach points out that 'if a school hasn't got SPHE, then it is not meeting certain requirements that are laid down by circular, so, of course, you would have to draw that to their attention'. TY is different because it's an optional programme.

'Not setting the agenda' also applies to other TY related issues, for example the concerns flagged by Smyth *et al*. (2004) relating to practices within schools where third year students are interviewed prior to embarking on TY. In relation to the issue of setting the agenda, Sinéad Breathnach states:

> In the brief that we are given, we are not supposed to go into schools with a pre-set menu and simply say, 'you must do this, this and this.

She has little doubt that schools respond to an invitational approach much better than to one that involves outsiders coming in and telling them 'you must do this, this and this'. She adds that, as a team, the SDPI has grappled with the drawbacks of this, not least when a school appears to have a culture that seems to want to work, not on issues to do with teaching and learning – what she calls 'core business' – but on topics that appear superficial, trivial or concerned with organisational maintenance rather than addressing young peoples' needs. She states that the SDPI team belive that they have a role in challenging such a culture and trying to move a school beyond it. In relation to the question of schools selecting TY candidates by interview, she remarks that this issue often comes up when the SDPI team is working with schools on their admission policies, in the context of indicators of good practice and issues about equality of access and participation in the school.

In her experience 'the complaint I hear most often' in relation to the development of TY programmes has to do 'with the whole issue of time'. She says:

> … if you are talking about people getting together in order to plan a coherent programme and making sure that they have a common understanding of what they are trying to achieve, that is time consuming and requires people to be together. You can't have them going off and doing their own thing and then just putting it together at the end. I don't know how you solve that.

Leadership Development for Schools (LDS)

According to Éilis Humphreys, LDS programmes such as *Misneach* and *Forbairt*[18] for school leaders take broad themes like 'leading students' learning', developing professional learning communities in schools and assessment for learning. They then allow particular issues to emerge from the participants. 'TY would always come up', she says. She adds that she sees a direct connection between school leaders' current willingness to engage with ideas of formative assessment and TY. 'To me TY really opened the door for that kind of thinking.'

The LDS experience with new Principals, however, is that if left to themselves they are inclined to focus on legislative and administrative matters, so, according to Humphreys, 'we have to drive the educational agenda very often'. There is a recognition that newly appointed Principals are often 'trying frantically to learn the ropes, and they are a bit more afraid of doing something wrong'. LDS policy is not just to deal with 'the nuts and bolts' of leadership but the crucial educational ones like 'leading learning'.

With resonances of the SDPI approach, the LDS approach is to pose questions such as: 'Are you offering flexibility to your students? How well do you cater for the needs of all the different students? What is your curriculum saying about your school?' TY will

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[18] *Misneach* is an induction programme for newly appointed Principals in their first two years. *Tánaiste* is an induction programme for newly appointed Deputy Principals in their first two years. *Forbairt* is a professional development programme for experienced principals and deputies which they attend together. Programmes for 'middle leaders' and 'future leaders' are also being developed. LDS also offers a Summer Conference with Northern Ireland counterparts.

always come up in the responses, Humphreys says, whether the school offers the programme or not. Like the SDPI, LDS does not have 'a position' on TY. According to Humphreys, 'We don't impose a point of view on them. We ask them to discuss it.'

That is not to say that LDS is 'value free … But we don't tell them what their values are. We allow them to explore their own values … We encourage schools to have a broad curriculum to meet the needs of all their students.'

When this point is pursued, it appears that the LDS team believes that they share a lot of educational values but they have not written them down explicitly in any set of policies or principles.[19] Humphreys also remarks that:

> We are not promoting one angle rather than another. But, having said that, we are promoting the principles of equity and inclusion and all of those things. In that sense, we would, absolutely, be encouraging people to explore everything that is available and to negotiate with their staff and to see what they feel is the best for a particular group of students, and to challenge some of them.

Humphreys adds that newly appointed Principals would, most likely, be familiar with the various programmes. However:

> If somebody wants to know more about LCA or TY, we have a virtual learning environment. So they can follow up, keeping in touch with their colleagues and us, to find out more. Or we might refer them on to the Second-Level Support Service or whatever might be appropriate for them.

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[19] Subsequent to the interview, Éilis Humphreys supplied additional information on LDS. This includes the following view: 'The LDS position on curriculum, teaching and learning includes the promotion of active and varied teaching and learning methodologies, the use of a broad range of modes and techniques of assessment and encourages self-directed learning. LDS also promotes the idea that teachers (and school management) are continuously learning, that it is a good idea to work collaboratively, share ideas with colleagues, both within the school and with colleagues from other schools, explore new resources and methods of teaching, change practices as appropriate and have a good system of communication with parents.'

National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD)

The NAPD was the first designated body of the NCCA and Mary McGlynn indicates that she sees its role as very centrally associated with working with the NCCA on teaching and learning issues. She says that this is a continual struggle as 'we are being torn away from it all the time with the regulatory approach and with the massive amount of legislation that has come on stream'. What she calls the 'substitution–supervision' area, referring to the consequences of the ASTI's industrial action in 2001, relegated concerns such as TY far down the NAPD agenda. She points out that this extended over four years and impacted very negatively on principals and deputies. 'People don't realise the toll it takes. I couldn't ask my colleagues to come out of their schools for two of those years – to anything – because there was such a horrific first year.'

She develops the point, indicating how the effects extended beyond members of NAPD:

> It was management of staff, of media, of parents, of everybody. We had an extraordinarily difficult role as an association that literally was a year in existence. As to bringing together three different sectors at post-primary level, and one sector having agreed to an agreement and the other sector not, eventually, as you remember…… Talk about trying to manage in a constructive way… (It was) a very difficult situation, which the Principals and Deputies carried on the ground as people withdrew. It had a huge impact on stifling everything. It stifled SDPI, as you know, and it's a great reflection on colleagues actually that when it eventually ended we resumed, in general – there would be a number of schools that there would have been other agendas – but, by and large, people went back to the focus of what are we about here. I mean they were so delighted to have the situation ended finally. I think everybody was worn out with it.

As well as being 'ambushed' by the industrial relations situations, McGlynn contends that school Principals and the NAPD have been 'hit with legislation, Act after Act, not just the education legislation but the employment legislation'.[20] A major consequence was that curriculum issues were 'marginalised'. So, she remarks, were concerns about disadvantaged students. She believes that the momentum towards reforming Senior

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[20] Mary McGlynn cited three particular examples: section 29 of the Education Act (concerning appeals regarding school exclusions), Contracts of Indefinite Duration (CIDs) and the integration of young people with special needs into schools, as being especially time-consuming and deflecting Principals from curriculum issues. Regarding CIDs she remarked 'in any normal company (they) would be dealt with by HR people.'

Cycle, which the NAPD supports, was lost when the Minister reacted to the NCCA proposals as she did. In her opinion 'we are only now getting back into the teaching and learning issues' that were priorities before the industrial relations dispute. She thinks the learning from the TY experience should be central to such debate.

Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland (ASTI)

In response to a question as to what she thinks has been the ASTI contribution to the development of TY, Moira Leyden is direct: 'I think we have a very proud record of contributing to it.'

She mentions work on various TY-specific resources, individual teachers' contributions to curriculum development initiatives, and the negotiations in the Programme for Economic and Social Progress (PESP), which ensured the allocation of teachers to schools offering TY.[21] TY grew, she maintains, organically from the work of teachers – ASTI members included – in schools. She also stresses that one has to see the ASTI in context. It has:

> … a complex role in advocating change in education, as, the ASTI is a trade union, that is our job. But, on the other hand, there is a moral imperative and there are political imperatives and if we do not represent the professional educators, be the voice of the professionals, we are not going to achieve our other goals. It's like two sides of the same coin.

She says that the ASTI's mission has always been 'to articulate professional educators' concerns for a good curriculum'. She recalls early attitudes to TY:

> In those doldrums days of dreadful public sector cutbacks, of misery in the country, of mass unemployment, our support for the TY did have a pragmatic dimension to it: that it would keep teachers in schools; that we would keep the numbers up; that we would keep the schools functioning, etc. And we were very, very happy with that particular national programme.

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[21] For example, during the mainstreaming of TY, ASTI activist and former President, Dermot Quish, in particular, acted as a most valuable mediator in winning ASTI support for numerous TY-related initiatives.

She believes that the union's support for TY arose from a pragmatic attitude to jobs, the interests of some individual members who were engaging well with TY and its potential as a measure to combat early school leaving. Asked whether there has been a change in the ASTI's attitude since 2001,[22] she replies:

> Now that the TY has become mainstreamed and we have the support services in the SLSS, etc., in very many ways we have – not so much lost interest in it by any manner of means – but we have moved away from direct engagement in promoting the TY, because we don't need to.

The author pointed out that there is some anecdotal evidence of ASTI members not engaging as much as previously in extra-curricular activities and that the question was directed towards whether this attitude had impacted on TY. In Leyden's opinion: 'There is concern, even resentment among teachers about what they are expected to do without any concomitant acknowledgment, affirmation or support.' Pointing out that she avoided using the word 'gratitude'– 'there is no expectation of that for teachers' professional commitment' – she adds: 'I haven't heard our members talking about reluctance to engage in out-of -school activities in the TY programme.'

Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI)

Speaking from the perspective of the TUI, John MacGabhann points out that:

> The TUI has probably had difficultly with TY on the one hand because there has been a perception – not entirely mistaken – that a lot of the schools where our members teach are precisely the ones where it is most difficult to retain people (students) for yet another year.

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[22] This is a reference to the industrial action taken by the ASTI with regard to arrangements for substitution and supervision within schools. Matters within the ASTI were exacerbated by internal tensions, including the departure of the then General Secretary of the organisation, Charlie Lennon (see, for example, 'ASTI rejects Labour Court ruling of treatment of its HQ staff', *Irish Times,* 22 November, 2003). When the relevant extracts from this chapter were shown to Moira Leyden, she commented on this footnote as follows: '. I don't see how you could construe the situation around S &S as having any bearing on a curriculum programme – the industrial action was exclusively focused on protracted response to pay issues – nothing to do with the curriculum in schools'. The researcher believes strongly that they are connected. As remarked in Chapter 2, 'Education, educational research, politics and decision-making are 'inextricably intertwined' (Cohen *et al.* 2000, p.3).

He says that as educators 'we want what best benefits the students that we have in front of us'. Recognising that the TUI represents many teachers who work in DEIS schools, MacGabhann believes that:

> What you are looking for – or what students mostly want – is a recuperative process or an assistive process that will allow them both to engage with the world but to hone those absolutely key skills without which they are going to struggle no matter where they go. So, I think TY can mean different things for different groups.

He clarifies that the TUI's ambivalence towards TY is both political and educational. While proud of the TUI's record in championing those who are marginalised by the system, MacGabhann is not uncritical of the union's actions. He wonders whether the TUI has been:

> … perhaps too concerned with the status of disadvantaged and not as much concerned – as it should have been – with what happens once schools have that status and have whatever accretion, in terms of facilities, that arises from it. It's a little bit like hospital queues. You have to do something about them but you have to do something in the hope of ending them.

He suggests that: ' 'disadvantage' would not be a permanent status. It would be a temporary status and the TUI needs to look beyond having the resources to applying them in order to do away with the need for the status of 'disadvantaged' '.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment –NCCA

As indicated in Chapter 1, the NCCA initiated a process of reviewing senior cycle education that included a concern that 'the benefits of TY are spread more equitably across the system' (NCCA, 2003, p.6). As can be seen throughout this chapter, the agency has stimulated fresh thinking about TY, particularly TUs. Indeed, it has played a major role in setting an agenda and shaping recent discourse on TY. Anne Looney points out that, notwithstanding Minister Hanafin's response (*Irish Times,* 2005) to the NCCA, the agency continues to develop its thinking concerning senior cycle. The NCCA has also begun to develop exemplar TUs. Later in this chapter, under the heading 'Participant's views of TY's future development', some reactions to Transition Units (TUs) are set out.

Support teams' interactivity

If the development of support teams has been a significant feature of the past decade or so, questions arise about how they relate to each other. A critique of procedures within the Department of Education and Science identified a 'lack of adequate planning' as the source of many problems. What became known as the Cromien Report observed that much of the Department's involvement:

> … had grown by often unrelated increments so that the Department ends up by operating a multiplicity of schemes with similar objectives, requiring multiple payments and multiple evaluations… Another source of difficulties is the lack of clarity of many of the schemes which the Department operates … Because of the absence of adequate structures, new schemes, often in themselves very good ones, seem to arise haphazardly, through the energy and enthusiasm of particular individuals rather than as a part of a set of medium-term policy objectives, agreed for the Department as a whole and listed in order of priority. (Cromien, 2000, pp. 2–3)

One of the conclusions of a recent evaluation by the SLSS stated that 'There is a need now for curriculum and other professional domains to be addressed in a coherent and complementary manner' (Granville, 2005, p. 57). Granville proposed CELIS – a national Centre for Educational Leadership, Innovation and Support. This would incorporate the SLSS and 'other mainly curriculum-related support services and other services, such as the SDPI and the LDS' (*ibid*. p. 57).

In the interviews with representatives from SLSS, SDPI and LDS, enquiries about relationships between these three teams elicited responses that make it clear that this is a very sensitive issue. There is a perceived lack of clarity about boundaries. Each interviewee highlights the centrality of 'teaching and learning issues' to their work. There is an awareness that, from the point of view of schools, a plethora of support services can be confusing. The uncertainty seems to generate a language of territoriality and legitimacy and an understandable inclination to focus on the boundaries of one's own team and of others. The relevance and urgency of the CELIS proposal appears to be underlined by these findings. The lack of action on these proposals (Granville, 2005)

offers further evidence of the persistence of the disjointed and fragmented thinking at the heart of the system that Cromien (2000) identified. Furthermore, amidst the territorial manouevering, there is evidence that TY has slipped down the agenda of some of these agencies.

How Participants View The Challenges For Teachers And Their Continuing Professional Development Needs

While TY may be viewed as a distinct programme – a parallel universe – isolated from and, at times, in contradiction to established programmes, teachers are usually involved in teaching all the programmes on offer in a school: JC, TY, LCA. LCVP and eLC. The very different emphases expected in TY raise questions of professional identity and ongoing development. This section reports on how policy shapers and makers view some of these issues.

Challenges for teachers

The centrality of leadership is, perhaps surprisingly, emphasised by Moira Leyden, ASTI, when asked about the challenges faced by teachers in TY:

> I do think that one of the things about TY is the quality of instructional leadership from the top. What does the school see itself as doing and why does it want to do it and then how does it do it? … if you have that strong sense of instructional leadership, the TY programme will be good.

The interviewer pointed out that the evidence from the research suggested that co-ordinators, while happy to be leaders of students, frequently expressed ambivalence about giving any kind of leadership to their peers. Moira Leyden's response is to indicate that instructional leadership will lead to co-ordinators feeling 'more empowered and more assertive about their beliefs about a programme'. She acknowledges that there has been a strong culture of teacher isolation in schools, of colleagues not discussing professional matters such as classroom methodologies, and so, of co-ordinators' reluctance to 'try to rope in people to do things'. She suggests that the SDPI offers the

possibility of change. 'I think the SDPI has given the framework to our schools to build up organisational cultures and traditions that they didn't have in the past. These can allow these types of leadership models … to emerge.'

Leyden indicates that, for the ASTI, the idea of 'distributed leadership' requires further discussion in the ASTI, not least because of the post of responsibility structure[23] that 'was hard fought for'. For the ASTI, such posts are not seen in leadership terms:

> These posts are, in the main, administrative roles rather than leadership roles. These are not educational leaders, in the main. Some schools are very creative in the way they use them, but, in the main, the model is one of promotional opportunities for teachers to get extra money. The posts, moreover, don't necessarily entail a reduction of hours to do it for starters. That sends a message in itself. If it's worth doing, they should have time to do it.

She adds that the issues of leadership within schools probably needs to be debated more within the union. Leyden's remarks illustrate how the aspirations in the TY *Guidelines* towards TY as a collegial activity spearheaded by principals and co-ordinators might meet resistance.

John MacGabhann's (TUI) view is that co-ordinators could have much more of a professional leadership role in promoting openness and fearlessness among TY teachers 'as opposed to simply collecting the money for the trip to Italy'. Teachers, he says, face challenges rooted in the realities of the working day. There's a big adjustment required he says, between the approach in TY or LCA and in examination classes. Moving from

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[23] The tradition within the secondary schools – and the subject of formal agreements between ASTI-Management Bodies and the DES - has been for teachers to be given posts of responsibility as Assistant Principals (formerly A posts) and special duties posts (formerly B posts), and the accompanying allowances, on the basis of seniority, i.e. length of service within a particular school. In some schools the position of TY co-ordinator is associated with a post of responsibility, in others not at all. In VEC schools and in schools in the Community and Comprehensive sector, appointment to these posts is by competition and Assistant Principal positions are usually accompanied by a reduction in the number of teaching hours, frequently four hours. One consequence of all this is that at a gathering of TY co-ordinators a great variation of working conditions becomes obvious. Some co-ordinators have posts, allowances and reduced teaching hours, while others may have none of these, all irrespective of the number of students taking TY in a particular school or of the co-ordinator's knowledge of, or commitment to, TY.

one to the other can be difficult. He also points to school cultures as not being supportive of the kind of collegiality advocated for TY:

> There isn't a culture within schools of a teacher taking particular responsibility for developing a programme that would be taught by other teachers … we don't share material well within schools. Even the obvious things are not done. Teachers of English do not tend to produce notes and offer them to others. There is, on the one hand, a sort of cuteness about it and, on the other hand, there is a sort of professional embarrassment.

Reflecting on teaching in TY, Anne Looney, NCCA, identifies the challenges as slightly different from teaching other programmes:

> I think it is really important that teachers teaching TY like students … enjoy their company as opposed to simply enjoying their subjects. … You don't have the weight of the, 'I am the bearer of all knowledge', or 'I am the gatekeeper to the Leaving Cert.' behind you, so the power relationship is slightly different. I think it is useful if you like them. I think that would be a significant thing for TY. That's probably less significant in other areas where, in fact, your passion for your subjects may be enough to carry you through.

Eamon Stack focuses on the opportunities teachers have in TY:

> I would have thought that there were more opportunities than challenges for teachers. I see it as a positive thing. Individual teachers, I am sure, face challenges. There are more organisational challenges. There is obviously more classroom preparation involved. You are starting at a further point back in terms of preparation and planning. You may have more modules, maybe, in the year, so I would say there is more effort required of teachers and that is a challenge. There is probably more original thinking to be done in a good Transition Year.

He links the challenge of teaching a TY class to the broader issue of teaching itself and reveals a particular view of TY classrooms. According to him, for a teacher teaching TY:

> … there are challenges, yes. But I think they .. are professionally rewarding. I think teachers can see the students mature and change before their eyes… They get feedback from the students. Many students will openly express … their appreciation of what is being done for them in a good Transition Year. They are sharing with the teacher and the teacher isn't always giving of themselves. They are drawing a lot from the students. I think a lot is drawn

out of the students in Transition Year as distinct from knowledge provided to them by their teachers. So, challenges for teachers, managing all of that, of course, is a challenge. Again, for different teachers, it is a different experience. Maybe some teachers find it a bit difficult to have a different - maybe more informal - relationship with the students than they are used to in the more traditional classroom.

Stack agreed with the suggestion that TY classrooms appear more democratic: 'I would imagine so, yes.' He contrasts TY with less participative practices:

Some teaching can be - let's say in a Leaving Cert. and Junior Cert. - passive enough from the point of view of the student. There are huge lessons to be learned in terms of teaching overall from Transition Year. Of course, they impact on not just continuous professional development but initial teacher training as well.

Eamon Stack believes that a key feature of programmes such as TY, LCA and LCVP has been the emphasis on teachers collaborating. A 'whole-school' emphasis has also characterised the SDPI and WSE. He says: ''Whole school' means that we are in this together, whatever that is.' He links this collaborative trend with other initiatives such as teacher induction and pilot schemes on teacher mentoring, remarking, 'That is where I see the TY having played a significant part. It will continue to play that part in creating opportunities for more collaboration between teachers in fostering learning.'

However, the persistence of cultures of individual autonomy and isolation; of resistance to collaboration, is underscored by John MacGabhann, TUI, when giving a view on why teachers appear reluctant to write their TY programmes. He believes that even a common programme that might be written for all teachers in a subject area or discipline would transgress the sense of 'independent republics' that characterises teachers. He says that even when suggestions are made in an open and consultative manner, teachers are likely to reject them in favour of independence.

According to Michael Garvey, SLSS, the reasons why teachers are reluctant to write their TY programmes are: 'Because it is actually too much work. They don't have the time for it.' School leaders need to put structures in place to enable groups of teachers to come together to talk, plan and write, he says, mentioning 'a couple of days' and an

outside facilitator. As was seen in the case of Ash School, such an investment gave TY a strong momentum at the outset. A more casual leadership approach, according to Garvey, is unlikely to bear fruit: '… if you are saying "away you go there lads and, look, by the end of June could I see a copy of your programme for September", you will be whistling.'

In contrasting SLSS provision for TY and LCA, Michael Garvey reveals differing priorities. With LCA, 'we really overload schools in terms of in-service', because it is vital to engage teachers new to the programme from the outset. He is clear about the urgency of this because, he says, if teachers teach 'in the old traditional way, at the blackboard, chalk and talk… then those kids will be gone by Christmas'.   In his opinion, the critical mindset change is for teachers to move from a subject-focused approach to a student-centred one, where the emphasis is on students becoming more independent and more cooperative learners. Whether within 'the rigid framework of the syllabus or the more open framework of these programmes', Garvey sees the key quality in teachers as a capacity to relate to students. Despite a similar orientation in TY, the SLSS does not provide similar in-service for teachers of TY.

Michael Garvey is optimistic that the skills teachers have developed in LCA, TY and LCVP are finding their way into the mainstream, particularly in schools that are moving away from grouping based on perceived ability. The role of the SLSS, Garvey believes, is to develop 'high quality programmes of support for teachers from which they can take stuff away, apply it, find that it works, tweak it, come back and share the learning with colleagues'.

Éilis Humphreys, LDS, mentions a variety of challenges for teachers. Depending on their previous experience of mixed-ability classes, the grouping arrangement in TY (typically mixed-ability) may be daunting. Allied to this, she says, is that some teachers find it difficult to move away from textbook teaching. Thirdly, motivation can present challenges. She says:

> (In TY) the teacher doesn't have the same hold over them as they have when they can say 'you won't pass your Leaving Cert. if you don't do this'.

So it's motivation you are relying on. You are trying to build up the students' intrinsic motivation.

Experience tells her that teachers find writing the programme challenging. She thinks an explanation may be found in 'the culture of teaching'. 'Maybe writing isn't the teachers' norm', she ventures. 'Teachers are more used to speaking and interacting at a verbal and visual level rather than actually writing.' Like Michael Garvey, she says that giving teachers 'time to meet and plan can make a huge difference and even better if they can reflect as well afterwards'. She is also an advocate of the approach that says 'try something, come back and talk to your colleagues about it, and then do it again'. She remarks that 'If we could build that culture I think it would be a fantastic support', recalling that this strategy was particularly effective in the early days of mainstreaming of TY.[24]

Éilis Humphreys suggests that more collaborative cultures need development, 'with some give and take', indicating that this must go beyond a 22-hour teaching contract, but acknowledging that this requires internal school organisation as 'the teachers you need to meet are rarely free at the same time'.

This issue of time for teachers to collaborate 'comes up in relation to so many themes and topics' on all LDS programmes. The LDS position is to encourage people to 'be creative with the timetable', while ensuring that students have 28 hours' class contact per week. In her opinion, time for teachers to meet within the normal course of the school day should be 'more formally recognised as a need' and she would like to see the unions, the management bodies and the DES negotiate this. LDS, as an agency of the DES, does raise this issue in various fora within the Department. Humphreys mentions how the LDS was commissioned to write a report on school leadership with the

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[24] Éilis Humphreys was a member of the original group of 68 teachers who spearheaded the mainstreaming of TY in 1994 and was subsequently a member of the TYST, described in Chapter 1. She develops the point as follows: 'But it didn't matter that some of them didn't work. They could pick up the pieces and move on. I think that's great, to come to a workshop where they get new ideas, where they meet people who are doing the same thing, and they hear people saying this worked and this didn't. It allows them to be adventurous and not to be afraid to try something, in the knowledge that it may not work, and not to be afraid to say, 'hmmm, it didn't work', and maybe not to be afraid to even ask the students did it work or did it not work.'

OECD[25] and how this involved extensive contact between it and senior management within the DES.

Moira Leyden, ASTI, continually returns to teachers' working conditions. 'Many proposals for change are made without due regard to the capacity of the teaching staff to take on more work,' she says. The ASTI view is that 'teachers are already working hard', so if they are to engage more with colleagues, for example, in writing TY programmes, or even in becoming more reflective practitioners, 'we have to start thinking about their workload.' This concern prompts her to say: 'At the end of the day the ASTI is a trade union with our focus on the working conditions of teachers.' While not totally opposed to particular proposals, it seems that the instinctive reaction of the ASTI is to either favour the status quo or to attempt to slow down the process. It also puts more starkly the underlying message from others that teacher resistance to innovation is often inadvertent, covert and passive.

Marion Lyon, NPCpp, looking at TY from a parent's viewpoint, also sees a need for teachers to have more time for collaboration. However, she has few illusions about the authoritarian structure of many schools:

> I have heard teachers say that he (the Principal) is not interested in it. He won't delegate … there can be a lack of leadership and the lack of vision and the lack of consultation with the school community about what they want to offer, whether they are actually meeting the needs of the students and their parents.

Anne Looney, NCCA, believes that most teachers have a positive view of TY:

> I think teachers like TY … There is a sense of teachers getting to be passionate about things they don't normally get to be passionate about in TY. I think they like that. I think they find it a good thing to be involved in … I think the teachers like working with students on developing new teaching and learning strategies together. They feel quite positive about it.

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[25] *Improving School Leadership – Country Background Report – Ireland,* was published jointly by the OECD, the DES and the LDS (through Clare Education Centre) in March 2007.

However, in her opinion, this takes a lot of time and energy as well as advocacy. This can be especially challenging in mid-career, as teachers get older, she says. She indicates that early feedback to the NCCA from its piloting of TUs is that teachers like a 'beginning, middle and end' structure, but that 'they don't want it too ring-fenced', suggesting that the experience of curriculum freedom associated with TY is not one teachers are prepared to surrender. Looney also believes that the status of TY will be seen to have added value with the introduction of Transition Units (TUs), with the 'NCCA label attached'.

Talk of challenges leads some informants to be more explicit about teacher resistance to TY. John MacGabhann's contention is that some schools allow 'calcified, fossilised structures' to develop so that it's no surprise if some teachers 'just hide away and don't engage' with innovations. If the leadership in a school is not continually offering teachers opportunities then, he says, they will be 'progressively disempowered and their confidence will ebb'.

Sinéad Breathnach, SDPI, approaches the same issue from her experience as a Principal and says:

> … one of the challenges for the school principal is to try to ensure that every teacher who is teaching on Transition Year would be aware of the rationale for the programme and the main thrust of it, what the aims of the school are, and what the values are that it's striving for. And that can be very difficult to achieve.

She adds that, while TY clearly encourages teachers to be innovative, she is not so sure how widespread these practices are. Sometimes it can be just a small number of teachers on a staff. When there is a critical mass of teachers interested in being creative, this can 'bring people along', she says.

TABLE 6.2 SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS OF CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES
TEACHERS FACE IN RELATION TO REALISING TY'S MISSION

Some Challenges	Some Obstacles
Greater collaboration between teachers	Traditional authoritarian culture of schools; lack of time for planning
Collegiality and department planning	Teacher autonomy/isolation
TY co-ordinator as educational leader of peers	Post of responsibility structure in some schools.
Additional effort, preparation and creativity required	Feeling poorly prepared for this. Limited CPD opportunities
Greater focus on intrinsic motivation	Traditional reliance on extrinsic motivation : 'the exam'.
Write the TY programme	Lack of time, tradition or sense of urgency/relevance
Liking students and becoming more familiar with their life-worlds.	Age gaps; teachers experiences are/were perceived as significantly different from those of their students
More facilitative approach with students	Authoritarian tradition. Limited CPD opportunities.
Drawing out knowledge from students	Teachers' inclinations to impart knowledge
Develop more informal relationships with students	Teachers believing in more formal relationships
Be less dependent on textbooks	Lack of time for planning and preparation
Be comfortable with 'mixed-ability' groupings	Teacher routines, especially if 'streaming' is dominant throughout the rest of the school.
Need to re-write teachers' contracts	Requires extensive negotiation across numerous interest groups
Need for quality in-school leadership	Perception of absence of quality in leadership

Teachers' education and development

As evident from the previous section, these policy-makers and policy-shapers sometimes link challenges to teachers' professional development needs. This section looks at CPD in more detail. Informants tend to locate TY-specific CPD in the wider context of teachers' overall CPD.

John MacGabhann, TUI, is unequivocal in his view that teachers' professional education leaves a lot to be desired:

> We have been adequately trained perhaps for first stepping inside the door of the school but beyond that point, unless our subjects happen to require in-service because of the emergence of a new syllabus, there is absolutely nothing that constrains teachers to engage in continuing professional development.

He regrets that continuing professional development (CPD) is not available for teachers on a geographically accessible basis. Because there is no incentive 'worth the name' for CPD, teachers become conformist and predictable in their teaching. According to MacGabhann, teachers 'do get what they think is a winning formula, or what, for them, represents the best formula that they have come across. It might be a winning formula – and they stick with it'.

For MacGabhann, 'the absence of continuity' is the greatest inadequacy in current teacher education provision. Following initial teacher education he suggests 'follow-on programmes of professional induction'. He believes that within the teacher profession:

> We need a continuing professional development component that is there as of right and that is exercised as a matter of duty and eventually it should become a matter of culture as opposed to a matter of duty; but it should start out as a matter of duty and it needs to be quality controlled. It needs to be incentivised and it needs to be resourced in a manner that isn't currently being done.

A similar perspective on motivation and incentives emerges from the ASTI. Moira Leyden remarks: 'At present there are both insufficient incentives for teachers to engage in CPD and little supports to do so. Their own commitment to their students is what motivates many teachers to undertake CPD. However, not enough is being done to enable the teacher to emerge as a reflective practitioner.'

Eamon Stack believes that teachers who teach TY for a number of years develop well professionally because of this involvement. John MacGabhann believes that responding to the challenge of TY has been liberating for teachers in giving them greater professional autonomy.

Moira Leyden observes an aspect of teacher culture, which can be sceptical of theory and academic work. This attitude, she contends, is because teachers do not have access to a range of professional development opportunities, which are relevant to their contemporary needs or stage of career development. She remarks:

> Teachers are very pragmatic and you can often think that they are almost anti-intellectual in the sense they would be very distrustful of theoretical discussions and an emphasis on the professional literature. That's very regrettable because theory and practice for the professional are the bread and butter.

Because of the lack of tradition of meaningful professional development, teachers, according to Leyden, 'see this as a luxury which the system doesn't allow them access to'. She would favour models of CPD, which value teachers' knowledge more.

For Anne Looney, 'understanding young people's life world' is important for TY teachers' professional development. She explains:

> It is for all post-primary teachers generally, but I think for TY you really do need to … understand the culture and life world and the way in which young people operate and connect to each other, which is just quite different now from adult worlds.

She recalls a time when teachers and students 'all occupied and shared the same cultural space', but that, she says, is no longer the case. Because of TY's focus on personal and social development, there is an implicit promise to engage more with young people's life world. Teachers need to equip themselves to deal with this changed reality. In her opinion, young people's cultural lives and the ways in which they express themselves are increasingly demonised[26]. She suggests:

> I think that teachers need a navigation tool or a map to understand how young people live their lives. To just get some input into how that is. Because for most (teachers) – especially if you don't have teenage kids yourself –… are developing a view based on the newspapers, based on what media tell you about how young people live their lives, or based on the extremes of children's behaviour and you are missing out a little bit on some of the ways in which young people connect.

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[26] Anne Looney expanded on this point at length, citing aspects of modern technology that indicate 'the fact that they (young people) are learning faster and more'. She mentions that there were 2.7 million questions searched on Google in June 2007, which, she says, prompts questions such as 'who answered these questions before Google?' As she sees it, 'There is huge learning. Students are doing it for themselves in many ways and I think teachers need to understand that more and need not fear it. I think they do sometimes. That is a big CPD challenge. How to do it. Start with a module on the sociology of the adolescent in the twenty-first century for every post-primary teacher, she suggests.

Eamon Stack remarks that 'we are at a crossroads in terms of CPD'. Historically, he explains, professional development supporting the implementation of particular programmes evolved because of the way funding came on stream. He believes this was both necessary and useful. He continues:

> I think we are now in a different place. We are now in a place where the CPD of teachers has to be more on the overall competencies required to be a good teacher; maybe even regardless of the sector you are teaching in, but certainly regardless of the programme or subject you are teaching. Future professional development has to be based on the agreed, identified needs at school-level because I don't think you can easily identify these needs from outside the school.

He sees this more nuanced approach: combining the generic with the specific; and the school-based with the clustered and the networked; as having implications for all stages of professional development, which he sees as a continuum:

> I think it is all joined up. One of the issues about initial teaching education is that we should only expect so much from it. But we should know what that is and there is a need to prioritise, I think. We cannot expect all that the teacher requires to know and understand for a 40-year lifetime in teaching to be squeezed into the initial teacher education period.

Stack believes there is a need to prioritise what is learned at the initial stage. For him, the question is: 'What do we need to get done in initial teacher training?' remembering that teacher professional development training does not end there. He also favours developing a mentoring system:

> Many, many teachers will tell you – we were all there at one stage – it's only when you began to practice the art of teaching that you began to realise that there were deficits and you would wish to have a Principal or mentor colleague within the school to guide you through it.

However, if CPD is at a crossroads, what are the signposts to the different possible routes?

> We need to ensure that teachers – in all kinds of schools, small and large – can deal with all the practical issues that arise, that teachers are flexible and

versatile and that the basic skills of teaching are understood by all. It is back to the basics in a way.

He also appears to acknowledge that professional development support from the DES over the past decade or so has been somewhat piecemeal. In addition to 'the basics':

> … the interpersonal relationships within the school are critical. We have very good professional development programmes and teams out in the system all pursuing objectives, but there are overlaps between teams in some cases. If you are in the school, how do you deal with all of this? Our latest team is dealing with the issue about behaviour in the schools. But, of course, we know that behaviour is not unconnected to other matters in relation to a school. We have all the parts, so to speak. But what model of vehicle are we going to make with all the parts going forward?

In relation to TY, he remarks that with over 500 schools following the programme:

> Running professional courses at a macro level for all of these assumes they all have the same professional development needs, but they may not. Neither do all science teachers have the same needs. Some are doing professional development in their own time. If we introduce a new syllabus some of them may need very little additional professional development while others might need a significant level of professional development. We don't discriminate at present. We assume that it is a new curriculum and they all need the same.

His critique of DES practice is quite frank. He laments the lack of a more differentiated approach to teachers' CPD:

> We may not be giving enough to some and we may be giving something to others that is really not necessary. The same would apply to programmes. What are the key differences between the professional development you require for teaching the module of Leaving Cert. Applied and Transition Year? What are the key differences? Have they more in common than they have differences?

Eamon Stack doesn't think that the current model of numerous teams approaching schools with 'closed cultures' is effective. Such schools are 'unlikely to want to access, on a voluntary basis, a lot of the external support'. His response to a question as to the role of the SDPI in encouraging schools to look at their professional development needs

is to refer back to the early days of that initiative: 'It arrived on the scene at a time when relationships and the IR [industrial relations] climate was not great.'

He says that, while SDPI 'has steered a very balanced course through that, there is still some work to be done in that area.' He also indicates an appreciation of the limits of trying to effect change in a school from an external position. 'Sometimes you can only do so much from the outside. You really do need the initiative to be taken within schools.'

It becomes clear that by 'within' he means the Board of Management. This resonates with the views expressed by Moira Leyden, ASTI, and Marion Lyon, NPCpp:

> I consider it is very much a matter for the Board of Management. The professional development for staff should be the concern of everybody in a school. Up to recently it was very much seen as the responsibility of the Department of Education … Of course, the Department should be doing certain things, but not everything. In fact, management authorities have at times been critical of the Department for imposing professional development on schools. It is very unfortunate if we are spending huge amounts of money and it is seen by schools as an imposition. If professional development is seen as an imposition we certainly need to clarify its purpose, when it takes place.

Would this mean, in practice, that some of the decisions about spending the money should be transferred to Boards of Management? 'Definitely yes', is his response. With strong echoes of John MacGabhann's views on professional development as 'a right and a responsibility'[27] he talks about 'entitlement' and about the many teachers who voluntarily engage in professional development 'at a much higher level than they could ever reasonably be expected to be'. He says:

> Only when you look at each individual teacher within the school context do you discover the level of professional development teachers engage in: summer courses; people are on weekend courses; people are on distance learning course; people are doing masters in universities; they are doing

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[27] The Chief Inspector's views, voiced in July 2007, reflect the thrust and language of the *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* published by the Teaching Council, dated 27 March 2007. On page 31, under the heading of 'The Teacher as Lifelong Learner', the Code states 'Continuous professional developing is both a right and a responsibility and should be supported by policy and resources at local, regional and national level.'

diplomas; and so on. I imagine that even within a school, teachers engage in professional development that is not fully recognised or known about.

John MacGabhann also proposes more professional development at local school level. For example, induction programmes should include specific orientations to programmes within the school, in particular JCSP, LCA and TY. However, he is wary of making demands on teachers to acquire particular qualifications for TY. Apart from predicting that there would be a 'palace revolt' within the Teaching Council if it was proposed that teachers would have to acquire specific qualifications related to TY, John MacGabhann is of the view that such a requirement 'might marginalise TY even further'.

Summary of views regarding teachers' professional development for TY

Informants are keen to locate CPD for TY in the wider context of CPD generally. Teacher union representatives are highly critical of current arrangements for teachers' CPD. Lack of incentives and a lack of continuity are demoralising. Suggestions range from enhancing teachers' knowledge of the craft of teaching to giving them insights into young people's 'life world'. The DES favours CPD that reinforces the basic skills of good teaching. More school-based and clustered forms of CPD are suggested as facilitating greater and more nuanced engagement by teachers in their own CPD. Conceptualising CPD as 'a right and a duty' is a strong theme. The DES view that CDP is 'at a crossroads' points to imminent changes in, for example, the range of support services (SLSS, SDPI, LDS, etc.). A more active role for school boards of management is encouraged.

Challenges for school leadership

The evidence from these participants reinforces the view emerging from the first part of this research, (Jeffers, 2007a, p.273), that quality school leadership is critical for a successful TY. While Boards of Management, Deputy Principals, TY co-ordinators and Assistant Principals can all play valuable leadership roles, Principals are pivotal in

ensuring that TY becomes embedded in a school. Additionally, leaders who wish to bring greater coherence to TY:

> … need to listen to the concerns of all stakeholders, clarify how the values of TY support and challenge the stated and unstated values of the school, encourage a climate that respects innovation, use time in ways that prioritise learning, dialogue and delegate – particularly to coordination teams – and play a lead role in telling the school's TY story with a voice that is authentic and consistent with their own values, both spoken and practised. (Jeffers, 2007b, p. 20)

Asked to identify challenges facing school leaders, Éilis Humphreys, LDS, indicates that 'the moral or ethical question of TY costing money' is a concern for many. She cites the tension between the desire to offer learning trips outside the classroom and the need to ensure that the programme's cost are not prohibitive to individual students. An even more delicate challenge can be to resist the temptation 'to use TY as part of the damage limitation exercise when allocating teachers to classrooms'. She expands on this point:

> … you know you will have a difficult teacher who, if you put her into or put him into an honours Irish class you are going to have complaint after complaint from parents, whereas if you put him into TY Irish, well, sure look at it, maybe he will be able to do a bit of basic Irish, or Irish music, or Irish dancing or something else with them so that we won't have the parents on our back. So, sadly, it is a concern that I would have certainly in a small number of cases but nevertheless I think it is there.

This frank admission serves to underline how TY may be valued differently from other programmes. Indicating that this issue is addressed in LDS programmes for newly appointed leaders, Humphreys also acknowledges a variation on the theme of teacher allocation, which is the teacher 'who says I don't want to teach TY'. She suggests that the crucial question is why the teacher does not want to teach TY and that LDS would encourage Principals to engage reluctant teachers in conversation about their reservations. She also acknowledges that 'a year might come when you have no choice but to put them in' (to TY).

Confirming the layered nature of the optional/compulsory question, the LDS has also come across schools that actively select students, who say 'we only have one group

because we only want to have one group'. Humphreys says that while she personally would prefer these schools to open TY to more students, the programme structure might have to change, returning to the question of cost to individual students. She adds that, in her opinion, students who are more disadvantaged socio-economically 'perceive TY as for the other girls in the school, not them'.

Unease with the optional/compulsory dimension of TY as well as the cost of the programme are sources of anxiety that resonate with Mary McGlynn, NAPD. McGlynn sees the situation in its historical context. Regarding schools where TY is optional she says:

> This is happening out of a history that unfolded in an unstructured way, with people thinking on the ground: 'OK, what's the best for my school?' People made decisions and, maybe, made them in ways that they mightn't have seen the bigger picture, I mean 20 years later. Maybe there wasn't anybody there to challenge some of the reasons that you went down that route.

She points out that 'if you want schools to do a number of things, you have to acknowledge that you have to underpin it with resourcing … [which] isn't just money. It is personnel, it is accepting that modules in x or y that could be taught by a member of your staff are perfectly legitimate and reasonable.'

Sinéad Breathnach, SDPI, sees the challenge of bringing coherence to the TY as a central one for school leaders, adding that 'bringing coherence can cover a multitude'. She sees these challenges operating at a variety of levels. Leading teachers is critically important:

> One of the challenges has to do with the leadership of the teaching force within the school and the constant renewal of enthusiasm and the provision for professional development in a manner that doesn't cause the kind of disruption that the management bodies give out about. I think enabling the kind of planning that is regarded as good practice for TY to take place is a huge challenge. This is a coherence issue.

Eamon Stack, DES, states that he sees motivating teachers as the main challenge for school leaders regarding TY. He says: 'Motivation is such a basic part of so many

things. Leaders have to be self-motivated, to take a critical look at the programme, dust it down, reform it, change it, re-energise it.'

He then introduces a further metaphor into the TY discourse, a culinary one, to illustrate the challenge to keep TY alive and fresh:

> A Transition Year is a bit like cooking. It's not just the recipe that matters. It's the delivery of the Transition Year also. You have a critical audience every year, those students and those parents. It never stands still. That is a positive, but it's also a huge challenge. It is a huge challenge to keep it fresh for both the teachers and the pupils. Most Transition Years are on a developmental path, that may never reach the ultimate goal of the ideal programme. They know that what they have done this year is very good but immediately they are saying: 'Well, can we do that again or how can we improve it for next year?'

He also alludes to the theme of coherence. He uses the image of a train on the tracks to a particular destination as fitting the JC and eLC, whereas in TY it 'can take a scenic route in a positive sense, or it can lose its way. It depends on leadership'. And what happens if, while on the scenic journey, it gets derailed or lost? And what might contribute to its losing the way? His response poses important questions for schools, with strong implications that some schools are only hazily focused on TY:

> … an absence of clarity among the Principal and teachers as to what the Transition Year is meant to achieve in a school. If there is a fudge around what it is about, it is easy to get lost. Getting lost on occasion is not in itself a bad thing, provided you find your way again rather quickly … I don't want to say that everything should be so rigid ... but in the context of getting lost, if the programme is not well planned there is the danger that the enthusiasm could peter out of the Transition Year in the middle of the year and then it becomes a struggle for everybody.

He believes that schools need to continually self-evaluate:

> The basic question for a school is: 'Why are we offering Transition Year to our students?' Is it because Transition Year is being offered in the schools down the road or is it because we believe the mission of this school is unfilled unless we provide the Transition Year as part of the programme for our pupils? What is it that Transition Year does for the mission of this school that its absence would mean that we would have to change our objectives? It is as fundamental as that because it's one-sixth of the time a student spends at post-primary level.

The 'schools down the road' also feature in Anne Looney's view of the challenges facing school leaders regarding TY. She sees Principals as caught in a state of partial paralysis and TY as highlighting that condition. She says that the biggest challenge is:

> The fact that school leaders are almost trapped in a stasis by the polarisation of post-primary education, the fear of taking a step that would put me out of step, or behind the school down the road, especially in urban settings. It's a huge issue now for Principals. Nobody will move, or they will move, but not by looking to the needs of their schools and their cohort or the need of their schools, but by looking to the school down the road. It's a big issue for TY. It is a big issue in how they are organising classes in Junior Cycle. As I said, working-class boys are the most disaffected group now within Irish education in terms of engagement and most likely to find themselves in a low stream.

She is not particularly optimistic about these students' potential engagement with TY or about schools that don't currently offer the programme. In suggesting that TUs might offer some hope to schools, the implication seems to be that schools have found the challenge of the freedom to shape their own TY programmes daunting:

> Whatever intervention you are going to make to try to support those students – they are disengaged and disaffected – they are not going to participate effectively in a TY that demands high engagement. And you are going to have to find a way to – if you were to say to a school 'we are going to introduce TY', there would be a huge challenge to go from not having a TY to having a TY. The Leaving Cert. Applied, which offers modules and blocks and things you have to do, offers a lot of support to a school in that regard. Maybe the Transition Units might help in offering schools some structured stuff that they can get their teeth into. I think so. But I think in making a decision …to move and innovate, I think school Principals feel very caught by the polarisation processes that are going on and are very reluctant to move, one way or the other.

Michael Garvey, SLSS, is of the opinion that 'schools that work best are the schools where there is a conviction at very senior level'. He is quite dismissive of some small, rural VEC schools which he describes as 'a barren wasteland in many senses for TY, a lot of these types of schools.' He believes that there is a 'poverty of thinking' within such institutions – 'schools that to this day haven't dug themselves out of the 1980s'. He believes that some VEC schools:

> … haven't developed the capacity to look beyond the VEC. When they look outside of themselves for guidance or anything else their focus is always directly to the VEC office, direct to the CEO. They don't go any further. If you don't have a CEO there who is really energetic about supporting the development of schools, well, then those schools are basically lost.

The frustration of the leader of the SLSS with the VEC system is palpable. He cites exceptions to this generalisation and mentions both the VEC in Co. Meath and the one in North Tipperary.

Participants' views of TY's future development

All interviewees were attentive to the NCCA's (2005) proposals for significant shifts in the direction of Senior Cycle, as outlined in Chapter 1. Minister Hanafin's reaction to the suggested changes (*Irish Times*, 2005) was foremost in many minds.

Moira Leyden, ASTI, expressed disappointment with the Minister's reaction. John MacGabhann, TUI, indicated that while the NCCA proposals wouldn't reflect all TUI thinking on the matter, 'in some respects they reflect it reasonably well, core elements I think'. He welcomes the notion of 11 TUs over three years, suggesting that schools would have the option of distributing them or having a discrete TY at the start. The TUI is highly conscious that 'those whom society determines are most in need of schooling are those who get least of it'. Changes should be directed to increasing opportunities for all young people to benefit from a six-year cycle. Asked if this means a compulsory TY, he says 'yes', adding that flexible models and more incentives[28] are needed. For example, developing TUs to accommodate LCA would be important.

Anne Looney believes that the NCCA proposals would give more flexibility to individual schools regarding the use of TUs across Senior Cycle and so would ensure

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[28] Regarding incentives, John MacGabhann develops his point about 'those most in need of schooling getting least of it' while those already privileged benefit most, by saying this reflects other patterns of dual thinking across society. Arguments, he says, about incentivising the wealthy involve giving them more wealth or ways of creating more wealth. However, when it comes to the poor, incentivisation is often about 'making things harder for them, cutting social welfare payments and so on'. 'There is an element of that in the educational system as well', he says.

that TY is no longer 'positive for some kids and negative for others' (those who don't do it). Like John MacGabhann, her main focus is on ensuring that those who are currently poorly served by the system get the benefit of six years' post-primary schooling, including the social and personal development associated with TY.

John MacGabhann says that the TUI was broadly favourable towards the NCCA proposals for Senior Cycle. It requested that the notion of dispersed TUs would not 'be thrown out'. He describes the idea of a single TU over a two-year programme as 'patent nonsense', implying that, once again, TY would be colonised: 'You can imagine the seriousness with which that would be treated and you can imagine how the boundaries of that would gradually fade away to nothing.'

He regards the possibility of 11 TUs over three years as attractive. Firstly, he contends, the argument for those who are resistant to TY would be gone and, secondly, all students would get the benefits of TY dispersed over three years. Rather than favour one option, the TUI would like schools to have choices. 'We were neither dismissive of, nor opposed to, the discrete transition as the first of three years at Senior Cycle. What we wanted was for schools to have the option.'

Michael Garvey, SLSS, voices the opinion that, following the Minister's response, the NCCA proposals for schools in 2010 'seem to be dead in the water'. Garvey is succinct in his fears. Transition Units, he says, '… may well allow more people access, may allow more uniformity of access for all students, but I think you will lose the programme's essential element.'

He suggests consolidating TY and trying to extend its values across the system:

> I think TY has been hugely successful. It's an international icon. I think we should be looking at ways to sustain it and develop it rather than finding ways to strip it out of the system. I think it would be wonderful to take elements and to use them to enrich the established Leaving Certificate.

He is concerned that LCVP, which he regards as a particularly valuable development over the past decade, might disappear completely in a new dispensation. He believes

that the most vulnerable are well catered for by the LCA and that high flyers tend to be well motivated but there is a group for whom 'there is little to energise or motivate them'. These are predominantly those who don't do TY.

Éilis Humphreys, LDS, likes the flexibility in the NCCA proposals for Senior Cycle that allows for a stand-alone TY or for the spreading of TUs over three years. She thinks the latter would be especially effective in schools where TY is currently optional, adding, 'but I would be reluctant to let go of the stand-alone one'.

Marion Lyon says that there is broad support within the NPCpp for the NCCA proposals for Senior Cycle, adding that 'Personally, I think the one year gives you the full package' and she would prefer it for all students.

Evidence for Anne Looney's view of an increasingly polarised system comes from the NCCA experience of piloting the development of key skills at Senior Cycle. Some parents indicated that 'I am not happy … if that is not going to help them in the exams.' She sees an 'increasingly vocal group of parents' who pressurise schools, wanting reassurance that initiatives like TY will improve their children's chances in public examinations. For Anne Looney, the issues boil down to a very fundamental one:

> I don't know what Principals can do in the absence of any sort of national policy that says we are either having inclusive education or we are having segregated education … The absence of any kind of statement makes it very difficult and the absence of any statement is policy in itself. Effectively, I think, it says: we will let the market decide, we will let it sort itself out and we will stand back from it.

Instead of a policy, she maintains, there is a discourse of 'fair shares' which says that every school must take its fair share of special needs students and of immigrant children. Audits are conducted and then published in newspapers as league tables which, inadvertently, enable parents to compile lists 'of schools they won't be sending their children to!'

Since the publication of its proposals, the NCCA has continued to discuss, develop and refine the concept of TUs. For Anne Looney, TUs will integrate TY learning with the

rest of Senior Cycle. She suggests that one needs to view the three types of courses: subjects (180 hours), short courses (90 hours) and TUs (45 hours), as components of a portfolio of qualifications across Senior Cycle. She indicates that the universities 'didn't see any difficulties' in making the completion of a number of TUs a matriculation requirement. In terms of spreading TUs across the three years, she provides an example that might be most appropriate, she says, during the later stages of sixth year: 'a 45-hour Transition Unit of study skills and personal management and all that kind of thing would actually transact hugely in very academic school'.

At the TY national conference in April 2007, the NCCA ran two workshops that 'comprised of a short presentation on the background and rationale for TUs, the proposed structure of the units, and the development process underway with network schools' (NCCA, 2007b). One hundred and twenty participants at the workshops responded to questions about the benefits and challenges arising from TUs.

TY co-ordinators and school principals, the two most dominant categories of teachers attending the conference, were broadly welcoming of TUs, with some of them clearly enthusiastic. Responses to a question about perceived benefits outnumber those about challenges by nearly 3:1. The dominant benefit of introducing TUs was seen as adding a greater structure to programmes while the most frequently mentioned challenge related to constraints of time. The following is a chart of the main themes derived from that data.

TABLE 6.3 BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF TRANSITION UNITS AS SEEN BY CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS, DOMINANT POINTS

Benefits	Challenges
Could refresh TY, e.g. *good for bringing new life to TY programme*	Time constraints, e.g. *planning requires time*
Validates and formalises good practice, e.g. *validation of a lot of work being done already*	Timetabling, e.g. *rotation of modules every six weeks – 15 hours each*
Would bring more structure to TY, e.g. *structure for teachers who do not like unstructured programmes*	Might stifle creativity, e.g. *danger of becoming too structured*
Adds to the TY's credibility, e.g. *would give some 'status' and 'weight' to TY*	Might feed competition between schools, e.g. *would a school that uses them be perceived as 'better' than one that did not?*

Motivating teachers new to TY or not yet involved, e.g. *very helpful for all staff – to encourage non-teaching staff to get involved*	Motivation, e.g. *getting teachers interested and enthused*
Good for staff development, e.g. *clarity for all staff – better able to evaluate/modify*	Undermining TY values, e.g. *would points be eventually allocated to them in the eLC and does this go against all TY is supposed to be about?*
Reduces work for teachers, e.g. *could allow 'lazy' teachers to have work done for them*	Increases work for teachers, e.g. *will be seen as lots of work, will need lots of resources and in-service*
Generates resources for continuity, e.g. *concrete set of materials which can be passed on from teacher to teacher*	
Enables interdisciplinary and cross-curricular work, e.g. *facilitates a marvellous interdisciplinary approach to education in TY which is of utmost importance*	

Respondents did not seem to engage at all with the idea of TUs being spread across the three years of Senior Cycle, either as a benefit or as a challenge. Neither is there a focus on other important dimensions of TY, e.g. students' participation, links with local communities or modes of assessment. Perhaps, with co-ordinators and principals, the understandable focus emerges as organisational and technical, school-based and operational. There seems little engagement at the system-wide or structural level. One can only speculate whether other perspectives, e.g. teaching and learning, would dominate if the questions had been posed to teachers of TY who were not co-ordinators or Principals, or other groups such as students, parents, employers or policymakers.

The NCCA proposals are, according to Eamon Stack, 'in the melting pot'. He emphasises the sheer size of the proposed undertaking, highlighting the need for 'an intensive professional development plan in many, if not all, schools' that would have to precede any implementation. Contrasting it with the re-structuring of Senior Cycle in the mid-nineties, which included the mainstreaming of TY, and in which Eamon Stack, as a Senior Inspector at the time, played a major role, he says, '… while it was significant, (it) was nothing as big as what the NCCA is talking about now'.

As he sees it:

> There are many good ideas within the proposals. But whatever is planned has to be implementable at school level – in schools of all sizes. It's about a

significant system change. We have experience from the primary sector of changing the entire curriculum. It has been a huge project, over nine years or so.

The question was put to him that the some other interviewees' interpretation of the Minister's rejection of – to use her own words – 'the Rolls Royce' model was to see it as cold water on the whole project. Did he think this was a harsh judgement?

> I think it is a headline remark which isn't accurate in its level of detail. The Minister was very clear in her wish to progress the broad concept of the shorter courses and that is in train, as well as the Transition Units. The Minister's attitude is: to see in a concrete way some of the detail before buying into the big plan. The big plan was just a plan and some bricks have to be built and the short courses or the half courses, for example, on enterprise education and so on; how will all this work? Whether it's the full model or whether it will be somewhat less than this, change is inevitable. It is all about the scale of change and the pace of that change.

Specifically on TUs, Eamon Stack appears to see possibilities and dangers. He suggests the example of 'Road Safety' as particularly suitable for a TU. 'Why expect every school to have to invent something when a lot of people can come together collaboratively and produce an appropriate programme?'

At the same time, he appears keen to maintain the local character of each TY, adding: 'But I don't think you want to pack the programme with Transition Units. It is all about balance. At the end of the day the school should be making the call about what it is putting into its programme.'

It is also clear that the Chief Inspector doesn't favour spreading TY over the three years of Senior Cycle:

> I would say Transition Year will continue to be part of the Senior Cycle option for the foreseeable future. When I heard views expressed in recent years – and also in the past – about the 'wedge' model, I had concerns about the integrity of the year getting lost in the process. I think it is too complex a process for schools to manage, 25% of this or 50% of that over a two or three-year timeframe. I think there is some value in the year being a stand-alone year. What we need to do is to continue to refine Transition Year. I don't see any big-bang reform necessary.

He explains that the focus of that refinement should be on teaching and the professional development of teachers.

While the interviews centred mainly on macro issues regarding TY, interviewees occasionally ventured into making specific suggestions concerning aspects of the programme. These indicate not only a familiarity with TY but a realisation that some relatively minor adjustments could enhance the experience. For example, John MacGabhann, TUI, fears a pattern where TY loses momentum as the year develops, where teachers' focus on the certificate exams, especially in the final term, can mean that TY students experience an anti-climax. He also strongly disagrees with the practice in some schools that once appointed as a TY co-ordinator 'one is in the job forever and a day'.

The resource implications of any change concern the ASTI, and Moira Leyden comments: 'We would favour the implementation of aspects of the NCCA proposals, given a commitment to concomitant investment.' In her opinion, had there been greater evidence of State commitment to transforming our school system to meet the needs of the twenty-first century, 'there would have been a more fulsome response from the teaching profession'.

Varying uptake of TY

Since the mainstreaming of TY in 1994, certain patterns of uptake have been evident. Identified trends include: higher levels of uptake among girls, among schools that charge fees, and in schools in the east of the country, with corresponding lower levels of participation among boys, particularly those from family backgrounds with low levels of formal schooling, and in small rural VEC schools (TYCSS, 1999b; Millar and Kelly, 1999; Jeffers, 2002; Smyth *et al.* 2004). It is important to note that such trends are neither uniform nor universal, as school contexts vary greatly (Jeffers, 2007b, p. 311). Smyth *et al.* (2004) observed that 'In terms of equity, it is important that all students should be allowed to access the programme which they choose … The challenge in

policy terms is to widen the appeal of the programme to a broader set of schools'
(Smyth *et al*. 2004, p. 220).

The emerging issue of TY and equity

The accusation that TY reinforces existing inequalities within the second-level
schooling system emerged as an important issue for this researcher. He had written
(Jeffers, 2002) about the uneven pattern of uptake across and within schools but was
surprised by the centrality of this in the comments, particularly from John MacGabhann,
Marion Lyon and Anne Looney. This section attempts to tease out informants' views on
the two related issues of TY as compulsory/optional within an individual school and the
uptake of TY across the 700 plus second-level schools.

Compulsory or optional?

In their research into TY, Smyth and her colleagues observed that 'the distinction
between compulsory and optional is not as clear-cut as it might first appear' (Smyth *et
al.* 2004, p. 24). Schools operate in different contexts and generalisations on this topic
appear unwise. Debate needs to be located in the context of a school's admission policy,
looking at the cohort of students coming in to first year (Jeffers, 2007a, p. 305).

Interviewees indicated a lively awareness of the complexity of the compulsory/optional
issue. Generally, there seemed to be a sympathetic view of small schools that do not
offer the programme and some concern about the criteria that schools might use to
'select' students for TY.

Éilis Humphreys, LDS, recalls that in the two schools where she worked it was optional
and 'worked well for us'. She recalls when, as Principal, she suggested that the school
move to it 'being for everyone', she met significant resistance from the co-ordinator.

Sinéad Breathnach, SDPI, says that from listening to principals, she thinks that a
perception that school drop-out rates will increase due to TY is most frequently put

forward as the reason why schools either don't offer it at all or make it optional. Parental resistance is often given as another, she says. She mentions having heard that:

> … parents who are very focused on academic success would see that Transition Year is a waste of time, and that they want to retain the option of a repeat Leaving Cert., in case that's necessary to get the required number of points.

She also indicates that concerns are voiced about students 'getting out of the study habit', repeating her earlier observation that the enthusiasm for TY is more directed to the outer layer of the 'TY onion' rather than to any other part.

Conscious of drop-out rates from schools, Breathnach believes that we need more varied approaches to schooling, not just the choice of TY or LCA but throughout the six year cycle if we are to embrace the lifelong learning concept.

Eamon Stack is aware that in schools where TY is optional 'alarm bells begin to ring about selecting'. As with other comments, his inclination is to locate responsibility within individual schools:

> It is about the criteria for selecting. I am happy as long as those criteria are clear, within the law, approved by a Board, published and known to parents. We have to remind ourselves that schools run their education provision for their community and for the parents and students in them. Schools need to have an agreed enrolment policy on Transition Year that, of course, passes all the tests including equality and so on, and everybody has an opportunity to apply. I would have concerns about students being excluded, specifically from Transition Year, either on ability, gender or on behavioural grounds.

Invited to expand on this latter point he remarks, 'Well, what would a behavioural issue in Transition Year be that would not be of the same concern in another programme?' While there may be 'health and safety issues' related to some activities in Transition Year, he is especially critical of:

> … broad sweeping statements such as 'he wouldn't be suitable for Transition Year because he hasn't been a good boy up until now in Junior Cert.' would be a vague enough, questionable enough, worrying enough sort of approach. It implies almost a culling of some students so that the people

in the Transition Year fit a certain kind of image of 'all the students we will be proud of'.

Stack points out that particular students 'may need it for educational and social reasons just as much if not more'. He refers to the 'remediation' dimension in the official guidelines (Ireland, Department of Education and Science, 1993c, p. 6) and that TY 'can serve various purposes'. He links this back to his opening comments at the start of the interview, of the need for schools to be able to tell parents the reasons for doing TY.

As already indicated, Marion Lyon, NPCpp, makes it clear that parents' views on the optional/compulsory question are divided. Mary McGlynn, NAPD, reflects on her own experience as Principal in a school where TY was compulsory. When it's optional in a school she imagines that the main problems will be deciding who can or can't go into TY. She is uncomfortable about stories she hears along the lines of 'x or y won't be allowed in to TY as they will be trouble-making'. With a compulsory TY, she says, 'When you take the whole cohort you take the disengaged as well. And they can be the surprises of TY.'

This issue throws up a further paradox associated with TY. Overall, informants' enthusiasm for TY is tempered by an appreciation that local factors may prevent a school offering TY to some or all its students. The tendency is towards leaving the matter for decision at local level, while also acknowledging that poor leadership at local level may contribute to resistance to TY in a particular school.

Gender differences

From her own school experience as a subject teacher, Deputy Principal and Principal, it is clear that Mary McGlynn, NAPD, was always enthusiastic about TY, recalling Richard Burke's concept of 'the time to stand and stare', which she describes as 'wonderful, a breadth of fresh air'. She recounted some of the particular challenges she

faced in convincing middle-class parents in an all-girls, fee-charging school of the purpose and merits of TY. She adds that:

> I think boys find it much more difficult … Unless you structure it more tightly – and I am not being judgmental in this because I have never taught boys – but I can see that they are at a different place and stage in their emotional development. I am not sure that they are still emotionally as well able as girls to deal with the freedom part. I think a lot of the boys' schools have had to struggle with that in TY, to get that emotional rigour as well as the other into it.

Michael Garvey, SLSS, believes that girls in general are more inclined to apply themselves to learning. However, he also poses questions that suggest that TY's development has been more suited to girls' interests. As he sees it, the TY programmes in girls' schools tend to be particularly good at developing interpersonal skills – 'very, very powerful and very, very strong'. He wonders whether boys are resistant to this emphasis and if the challenge for boys' schools is 'to develop programmes that actually captivate students' imaginations, and then you use that to release their other potentials'.

Mary McGlynn, NAPD, recalls that, in her time as Principal in a girls' schools, parents often reported that their daughters seemed to be coping with TY better than their sons. She echoes Michael Garvey's views, suggesting that girls have better developed emotional intelligence and so can deal with the interpersonal focus of TY better than boys. While very careful to point out that her views are based on anecdotal evidence and that she doesn't want to make generalisations, her comments resonate with those of Eamon Stack regarding the need to keep TY fresh: 'In any situation we could have got very lazy too about it and say we have a great programme and we just keep turning it over.' The suggestion seems to be that some boys' schools are re-running a programme that doesn't necessarily meet students' needs.

From a parent's point of view, Marion Lyon, NPCpp, says that, while aware of the differential uptake of TY along gender lines, 'I can't speak with authority as to why more girls do it.' However, she indicates that within the NPCpp there is concern 'about

the disengagement … of boys from the education system'.[29] She believes that greater access to practical subjects would improve the attitude to schooling of many boys, remarking that:

> It's amazing that in some boys' schools there are very few practical subjects. Any guidance teacher will tell you that if they had them [, i.e. practical subjects] in their school that a lot of those boys sitting outside the Principal's office wouldn't be there because they would be learning, they would be interested, they would be motivated.

Schools not currently offering TY

As mentioned earlier, the simple fact that some young people spend a six year cycle in second-level schooling and others spend five is seen by some as an equality issue.

John MacGabhann says that the TUI's ambivalent attitude to TY 'is both a political and educational one'. He is in no doubt that TY furthers existing inequalities. 'Those who are doing fewer than six years are disadvantaged, even if they go to Leaving Cert. – not to mention those that don't get there.'

From a justice perspective, he would like to see every school offering a six-year cycle. However he recognises that there are obstacles to achieving this. 'But I believe that a significant number of our schools[30] do not believe that they can keep their students there for six years.'

Hence, he argues that if 'some of the principles that underpin TY' were to be extended throughout the six years, then 'we would have greater success in keeping students for

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[29] Marion Lyon later explained that this concern has been evident at numerous NPCpp gatherings 'for a number of years' and is 'across the board' not restricted to working-class boys. She expressed particular concern about 'so many young people ending up in special care units and detention centres'. In her opinion, much of the disaffection is related to schooling. She says, 'They had difficulty learning and they didn't have that individual teacher who took them under their wing and supported them in the learning, worked with their parents. They really would have liked a better experience. It wasn't that they didn't want to learn but they just didn't have it within their resources. They didn't get the resources, they didn't get the help and very often they were never listened to.'

[30] The researcher believes that their term 'our schools' refers in particular to schools where TUI membership is high.

the long haul'. This proposal has echoes of CEB thinking from the mid-eighties and the flexible approach to TUs suggested by the NCCA in 2004. Regarding Minister Hanafin's reaction in 2005, he says:

> I was appalled by the Minister's decision in regard to the NCCA advice about Senior Cycle, specifically where TY is concerned, where she said that TY was, in all instances, in all cases, to be a discrete year. Because that seems to me to ensure that what element of injustice (there is) in current provision … will continue. And …it is only with great bad grace that she has allowed that the NCCA might consider the possibility of Transition Units being spread through the Senior Cycle in schools that have designated disadvantage status.

Attitudes to LCA can also reveal particular perspectives on schooling. Commenting on arrangements in some schools where those doing LCA are not allowed to do TY, he sees it as part of a '... segregationist mentality that undermines provision generally for students who may have difficulties'.

He is of the opinion that this view is rooted in 'a belief that certain kids cannot be educated'. It also, he believes, 'betrays a lack of belief in the Leaving Certificate Applied itself'. This attitude, he contends:

> … betrays a sort of moral void in terms of the way we perceive what can be done or should be done for students whom – for whatever reason – are not highly motivated or not highly academic or have not been highly academic. It is also absolutely and completely out of kilter with the avowed policy of lifelong learning. It treats learning as something that terminates at the point of departure from post-primary school.

Michael Garvey's view is that:

> It does look on the surface like a two-tier system. Perhaps a lot of the kids who would bypass TY are those who just want to have done and dusted with school and get it over with as quickly as possible. You could argue that those are the kids who might benefit most from it. Those who self select into it are possibly those who are probably more advantaged in the first instance. Now I don't know how you deal with something like that.

There has not been much discussion of this issue within SLSS, because, he says, the focus has been on students 'who are barely going to make it through the system in the

context of Leaving Cert. Applied'. He also says that 'I am not sure that requiring kids to do TY when they might not want to do it is necessarily a good idea either for them or for the programme.'

Sinéad Breathnach, SDPI, highlights the dilemma when talking specifically about DEIS schools and TY. Her impression of the reasons offered by some DEIS schools for the differential uptake of TY is along the following lines:

> It's such an achievement to hold students for five years. If you hold them for five years and then put in an extra year, you are lessening the possibility that they would actually complete a Leaving Cert. programme. I have heard that argued very strongly in some quarters.

Having worked as Principal in a school where TY was compulsory, she says:

> Ideally, if we truly believe in all that Transition Year has to offer, I think it should be across the board. If the research indicates, as it seems to do, that Transition Year leads to higher academic achievement, well, then it's contributing to inequity in many ways. If a Transition Year is available only to the already advantaged, or mostly to the already advantaged, and if in some sense it's not available for others, that's an issue that goes beyond the school really.

While the general thrust of inequality concerns regarding TY focuses on the lower end of the student achievement scale, Mary McGlynn, NAPD, points out that there can be nuanced attitudes across the spectrum. She says that, in her experience, there can be students 'who will get 600 points' who may have very real difficulties with 'relationships, with social interactive skills, with their emotional development'. The TY challenge of students who are 'loners' cuts across ability. For these students, she says, team work and team building in TY can be very beneficial. She also indicates that TY, with its emphasis on psychological and emotional development, can also be useful in assisting the diagnosis of young people with serious mental health difficulties.

Moira Leyden recalls 'the egalitarian instinct' associated with TY's original inspiration and says it is 'regrettable' that a 'distinct profile' (less uptake by boys and by those further down the socio-economic scale) has developed around TY. She has no doubt that lack of resources is a factor that inhibits TY uptake in some schools. In her view, it

is part of a 'system of financing our schools – allocating personnel or upgrading facilities – which is absolutely absurd'.

She proposes a more strategic approach and believes that this begins with Boards of Management. She says:

> We rarely talk about the Boards of Management in education. We have a legal framework for the governance of our school, that is, Boards of Management. We don't invest in these frameworks. We don't train them … We don't invest in educating the people who sit on Boards to enable them to discharge their duties.

In her opinion, this lack of investment fuels a cynicism about boards. Schools – including their board members and, particularly, schools catering for boys and/or in more disadvantaged areas – need much more support for introducing TY programmes, she believes.

The involvement of Boards of Management also features in Marion Lyon's (NPCpp) analysis of TY. She sees Boards as key arenas where questions about the provision of programmes like TY, and their quality, are explored. In her experience, these discussions lead to a healthy probing of topics along the lines of 'if another school can do this, why can't we? perhaps suggesting that TY's contribution to a greater democratisation of schooling is not just confined to the TY classroom.

The fact that TY is not in all schools is a matter of some concern within the DES, according to Eamon Stack. He says:

> We have concerns, for example, about Transition Year not being offered to the same extent in schools in disadvantaged areas. A very big issue as schools see this in terms of associated costs, even though I know that not all Transition Years need or should cost the earth. The Minister has recently increased the grants.[31] There can be constraints of staffing depending on

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[31] When TY was mainstreamed in 1994, the DoE introduced an additional grant to schools of IR£50 per student following TY. A DES presentation to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Science in 2004 highlighted this as an important factor in mainstreaming. The '£50' remained the situation until 2007 (becoming €63.49 with the advent of the Euro). At the TY Conference in Naas on 20 April 2007, Minister Hanafin announced that this grant would be increased to €100 from September 2007. (see also Jeffers, 2007a, p. 312)

how schools have planned their staffing. Schools may not always be able to deploy some teachers in a way they would like most into whatever programmes they want to, so there can be constraints. There can be constraints round the size of school too. That is a real one because there are critical numbers that you need to offer different programmes. There may also be constraints in terms of competition between schools in different areas.

Asked to offer reasons for the varied patterns of uptake, Anne Looney, NCCA, describes them as 'complex and multi-layered'. She believes there is a strong social class dimension:

The post-primary education system is becoming quite polarised for a whole series of reasons now in Irish society. And TY is part of that polarisation. TY appeals to schools, families and communities where education capital is high, where the kind of TY experience that the students are having pretty much matches family-type experiences, community links, belonging to things, connecting to things, going to places, right. So there is a strong middle-class label on TY, like it or not.

She contends that, in contrast to this 'middle-class appeal' of TY, the opposite is the case for less advantaged groups:

For students who are disengaging or disaffected, the notion of getting involved has no appeal for them. The notion of going anywhere with your teacher is the worst thing you would ever do. Or the notion of being involved with group work or projects or fund-raising is not something that they do. It is not something that they do outside of school either. So, I think that schools have a hard job sometimes selling it to a particular cohort, a particular cohort of parents and a particular cohort of students. I think that is one of the reasons. And the pressure is on the school, the students who don't have it, or say the school or the students who don't offer it; they don't really have a great demand for it, because it is very much seen as a middle-class project.

She points out that, from an economic perspective, additional funding is keeping certain young people 'who don't need it' in school for an extra year, remarking: 'I mean that is at the heart of the inequality that is TY.'

She explains that responding to this situation was central to the recent NCCA proposals for Senior Cycle. She acknowledges that persuading people to give up an advantage that

they have within the education system is 'a very difficult task'. She cites the work of Ellen Brantlinger.[32]

Looney expands on her view of TY as having a middle-class 'label':

> It is seen as something within particular schools, within particular neighbourhoods, something that some schools do and some schools don't. I think an unfortunate opposition has been set between the TY and the Leaving Cert. Applied that actually makes it worse. Right, so you have got TY schools and Leaving Cert. Applied schools. And then the group, the cohort in TY is becoming more middle-class and more female. I think that is problematic.

How might this polarisation be addressed?

> Our suggestion in NCCA was to try and break that down a bit and give everybody the experience. It is hugely expensive, a hugely expensive project. I have to say I think it is the only way. And I think you have to start breaking TY down and giving it to more people. Because at the moment, within the system – or giving it to everybody – because at the moment within the system it is just a further tool for – no 'tool' is the wrong word – a further vehicle by which inequality is reproduced.

Looney supports her concerns about TY's middle-class label by referring to the on-going ERSI research, commissioned by the NCCA.[33] She indicates that the next volume in that study will confirm the emergence of what she calls 'an academic TY' which she says is to ensure that 'when the kids come back on track that they are going to get 500 points and over'. She recalls the NCCA–ERC longitudinal study of the 1994 cohort of Junior Cycle students and the finding that TY 'adds points value'.[34] She questions whether this finding was, ultimately, to the benefit of the programme. On the one hand, it tended to silence those critics who suggested 'TY is a waste of time', but, she believes, fed into the polarisation that increasingly means that 'working-class boys are

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[32] *Divding Classes – How the Middle Class Negotiates and Rationalizes School Advantage* (2003), Ellen Brantlinger, London: Routledge Falmer, is discussed in Chapter 6.

[33] Researchers from the ESRI are following a cohort of students through their second-level schooling. An account of young people's experience of moving from primary school to first year at second level, *Moving Up* (2004), was followed by *Pathways through the Junior Cycle* (2006). *Gearing Up for the Exam?* (2007) was published subsequent to these interviews.

[34] See Millar, D. and Kelly D. (1999) *From Junior to Leaving Certificate, a Longitudinal Study of 1994 Junior Certificate candidates who took the Leaving Certificate examination in 1997, Final Report,* Dublin: NCCA–ERC.

disadvantaged and getting a raw deal from the system'. She believes that TY is a big part of this problem.

Moira Leyden, ASTI, believes that schools need to regularly revisit their reasons for doing TY. She suggests that some schools' motivations for engaging with TY may require a re-examination. For example, 'Are they doing it because they have got a cohort of students for whom LCA may be a far more suitable curriculum model but they don't want to do that because it might send messages about the type of students they have, and the resonances that may have elsewhere?' These sentiments echo Anne Looney's concerns about polarisation.

Leyden also suggests that schools can't know in advance who might benefit – or not – from TY. She is pragmatic that the extra year in itself will allow students 'to grow, to express themselves':

> You may see the kid who may be very weak academically but will become the real leader when it comes to getting the team together for the TY, for the media production, or the drama, or the community service or whatever. So, I think it is a fantastic socialisation experience for our young people. They are in a very secure and safe environment for longer.

More mature students are more likely to make more mature choices, about subjects, further study and careers, she adds.

Anne Looney is keen to ensure that her point about polarisation is not equated solely with academic aspirations. She says:

> … the polarisation is not driven solely by the pressure for points. It's also driven by a pressure to avoid Others, with a capital O. It's driven by that exclusion. It's a combination of the two things that is accelerating the process.

She returns to the absence of clear policies regarding inclusive schools. In her view:

> By not having that we are allowing the market to find its own base and the casualty levels are, I think, very significant … the Department of Education and Science needs to develop a policy on schooling in terms of inclusion.

Eamon Stack indicates an awareness of schools' fears and the 'market situation'. He says:

> A school sometimes can be afraid to take steps in any curricular area because of fears it has about its overall impact on a competitive context. If you have a school in an area that says it is going to offer Transition Year, the other school may well market itself as a 'serious' school in terms of Leaving Cert. results only and create a doubt in the mind of some parents. You can have all of that going on in a particular area.

He also recognises the retention issue, how there is a view that says 'if you have TY, by definition there are six years in the cycle and the students will not stay six years, the best you can get out of them is five'. However, he appears to cast some doubt on the attitudes of schools that don't offer TY, and in so doing highlights the absence of any direct viewpoint in this study from schools not offering TY. 'I am wondering is it about constraints or something else? This can only be ascertained with the individual school that has decided not to offer TY.'

Schooling in the future

Opinions about TY's future depend, of course, on how informants see the system generally developing in the coming times. John MacGabhann, TUI, sees particular merit in the NCCA proposals for changing the culture of schools, 'for students, for teachers, for school managers and for parents'. Greater collegiality and more distributed leadership have been high on the TUI agenda, he says. He is somewhat sceptical about the rhetoric from groups like the DES and the LDS when he observes what he calls 'the lack of follow-through'.

A concern for MacGabhann – though he indicates that this is not official TUI policy – is the need for some re-writing of teachers' contracts. Including rights and duties regarding preparation for the job, working with colleagues and professional development would be important, he believes. He would like teachers to have entitlements and obligations to a certain number of CPD hours annually, with

opportunities being available at school level and for clusters of schools and more hands-on involvement in CPD by the Inspectorate and the third-level institutions.

Michael Garvey, SLSS, identifies the use of ICT in the system as the biggest single challenge for schools in the future.

When asked about schooling in the future, Éilis Humphreys, LDS, prioritises change in the culture of schools. She would like 'more freedom for students to apply themselves'. This emphasis on a more independent learning model, 'treating them more like adults', echoes the thrust of the NCCA's *Directions for Development* proposals.

Mary McGlynn, NAPD, finds Howard Gardiner's theory of multiple intelligences both exciting and challenging and indicative of a way forward. She asks: 'How are we ensuring that all of those (intelligences) are being challenged in the time that students are at school?' She also observes that today's students appear more confident and 'learn in so many ways outside classroom situations' and wonders whether we are looking sufficiently at the implications of this for learning. She is also a vocal opponent of commonly practised grouping arrangements. She explains:

> I have a passion about this whole concept of streaming. I see it in a very simple way: if you tell a student that this is your value, or tell anybody in life this is what you are valued at, and you are in group for whatever, you are not going to come out of that; you have been labelled, and you have a self-image and your self-esteem is at that level.

As regards the future, McGlynn sees the need for a wide debate that extends well beyond schools. The background to the 2007 NAPD conference[35] was to promote debate on 'visions and values'. The theme grew from the following questions:

- Does Irish society and the Irish education system still share the same vision and values?
- What does Irish society expect from its post-primary schools?

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[35] Proceedings of 'The Kilmainham Symposium' can be found in the NAPD Journal, Issue No. 1, May 2007.

- How can unscientific league tables (which speak in the only terms acceptable to a materialistic, success-oriented Irish society) reflect the intrinsic value and dignity of the human being?

McGlynn says that there was a feeling that 'We need actually to begin to check base with everybody at this stage.' She indicates that there can be a mismatch as schools deliver on what they think they are about and then find out that 'this isn't really what people think you are about or want you to be about'. Debates about skills for an economy, rather than education, about 'faith schools', social problems like suicide and eating problems, all highlight these questions about schools and their purpose. In her opinion, schools are not focusing enough on questions about society's expectations of schools.

She voices unease about many aspects of current arrangements and returns frequently to the need for more national debate about schooling:

> And I don't think it should be a confrontational thing. I think we need to listen more to each other. I mean industry, whatever, needs to listen. We need to listen more to what people are telling us an economy needs, or a society needs, but equally we have got to look at how schools perceive their role and how schools perceive their roles in education.

Some of the most urgent questions, she says, concern the relationship between poverty and schooling. For example, she says: 'I have no doubt that we are ghettoising schools now with labels like DEIS.'

Moira Leyden, ASTI, says that the NCCA proposals contribute to the discussion about transforming the school system for the twenty-first century. However, she appears to regard the proposals as having been dismissed, remarking, 'it was very roundly knocked on the head because it would cost too much'. She says that, for some years, the ASTI has favoured 'a more comprehensive statement of your experiences and achievements at school' in addition to an eLC.

Marion Lyon, NPCpp, is emphatic that the future of programmes like TY demands not only greater consultation with parents, but also with young people. She is conscious that young people today are less compliant than in previous generations. She says:

> You can see how our young people are much more aware of their rights – and will tell you that – and a sense of fairness. So, they do not want to be coerced into doing things. That can have devastating consequences.

While alluding to the optional nature of TY, she speaks strongly about the 'pressure that some parents can put on (their children) for exams'. She cites examples of young people requiring psychiatric care 'because of parents insisting that they do honours Irish, or whatever'. 'It's just unbelievable, it's just inhumane', she says. Her preference is for consultation with young people at all stages of schooling:

> I think also that if the student voice is not involved in the designing of the programme at their school, they really have no sense of ownership and their commitment may not be what it might be. Students are very much aware that they could have a role and they should have a role, but they don't always have it. If you listen to the young people at national level like the Union of Secondary School Students, they will tell you that.

She would like to see students in receipt of personal guidance from the start of secondary school. She greatly regrets how little attention is given to consulting young people, remarking, 'But the student voice isn't listened to at all. Suggestions were that the Student Council was going to be that great opportunity and very often it is not.'

She refers to examples of students engaging in valuable projects and not being listened to. She asks why more schools don't have students attending parent- teacher meetings, or students meeting the Board of Management at least once a year. She advocates such involvement not least because she thinks it would have a major impact on young people's motivation for learning. She contrasts national photo-opportunity events (such as those related to Student Councils where young people meet the Minister for Children) with the reality in many schools:

> We have these big events and we will have the photographs in the papers and all the rest of it but back at the local school level there is very little being done about listening and giving them an opportunity, whether in the designing of the SPHE programme, or identifying areas that have concern to

them. There's a role for the Student Council in that – whether it's about their healthy eating options, the school uniform, the TY programme. They are all opportunities where we could actually listen and let their voices be heard and take their views on board.

She thinks that greater consultation with boys concerning TY would be profitable because, she believes, boys 'have a great sense of fairness' and will be direct:

> They will quickly identify the teacher who is not very fair, the teacher who is boring and the methodologies engaged … They will be to the point whereas your girls very often will hedge around and may be not be so critical …

Of course, parents and teachers don't always find it easy to listen to 'the moan and the whinge', but Lyon is passionate about its importance. She also expresses strong views about three other areas, each in its own way associated with the development of TY: a framework for embedding ICT skills in the curriculum; the urgency of introducing SPHE at Senior Cycle; and adequate guidance provision throughout the school period.

Anne Looney, NCCA, concludes by posing an important question: What would the educational environment be like without TY?

> I have often wondered what the situation would be like if we didn't have TY. Would we have a three-year Senior Cycle? Where would we do driver education? Would we have pressure to have greater community links for everybody in all classes? … TY is such a feature of the Irish landscape, you couldn't imagine what it would be like without it – but it would be interesting to speculate what would have happened if we didn't have it. Would the Leaving Cert. Applied be different, for example? … Would we have had to invent it? Or would we have to change the way we do Senior Cycle, because of all the pressures – to do work experience and to connect up and so on?

TABLE 6.4 SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANTS' PRIORITY AREAS FOR SCHOOLS IN THE FUTURE

'A different school culture', as proposed by the NCCA	Greater application of multiple intelligence theory	Greater use of ICT in teaching and learning
More emphasis on independent learning	More use of active learning methodologies	Changes in ability grouping practices (more 'mixed-ability' classes
Closer links with local communities	Greater consultation with students and their parents re students' learning	Improved provision for SPHE
Need for a society-wide debate on the purposes of schooling	More extensive student guidance	Re-negotiation of teachers' contracts.
Address the issues of inclusion and exclusion and equality and inequality	Greater collegiality among teachers	More distributed forms of leadership
CPD hours as entitlement and right	More comprehensive school Leaving Certificate	

Conclusion

This chapter has given voice to the views of some people in senior positions in nine key educational agencies. These informants generally articulate a palpable enthusiasm for TY, for its freshness and creativity, for its developmental and liberating impacts. Undoubtedly, there is strong support for TY as an enhancement of much current provision in schools. There is some support for the view that TY has a positive impact on school climates.

Not all interviewees had prepared for the interview by reading the research report *Attitudes to Transition Year.* Perhaps because of this, some informants appeared much more familiar with the details of TY - as distinct from its broad thrust – than others. While all nine are extremely busy people, the researcher formed an opinion as the interviews progressed that TY has not only slipped down the agenda for many agencies but that it is now regarded as somehow 'under control'. Linked with the conclusion in Chapter 4 that schools *domesticate* TY, the observation that schools tend to be cautious in their interpretation of the TY guidelines and the DES assertion that TY is now 'firmly embedded in the system' (Ireland, Department of Education and Science, 2004) one senses that TY is no longer a curriculum priority for many of these agencies – presuming that it once was.

The extent to which some interviewees regard TY as inhabiting a 'parallel universe' is also striking. What might be called 'ring-fenced thinking' may well be a characteristic disposition to many innovations, especially those that might threaten to disrupt the *status quo.* As discussed in the next chapter, attitudes favouring existing practices can be a covert form of resistance to innovation.

Of course, a major conclusion to draw from this chapter has to be the markedly different perspectives evident across the spectrum. Each voice has a unique timbre and offers distinct and valuable insights into TY. As might be expected, voices from the two teacher unions ring somewhat differently from those emanating from the DES or the NCCA, though there are also some striking coincidences of perspective. Among the agencies charged with providing support to schools, the evidence offers a sense of independent republics rather than membership of a confederacy.

One of the concluding remarks at the end of Chapter 4 concerned parents' lack of information about TY. The interview with the representative of the NPCpp strongly re-iterates this concern. Indeed, one suspects that many teachers might be surprised at how well informed – and frustrated - this particular interviewee was.

Following the nine interviews, this researcher concludes that responsibility for the promotion and development is too diffuse across the system. Given the ambiguous attitudes to the programme - already charted in Chapters 1 and 4 – there seems to be a need for greater advocacy for TY and its values.

Chapter 7

Discussion

Introduction

Having engaged with the foregoing data relating to Transition Year, the reader and the researcher have to pose the question: "what is the meaning of all this?" A partial answer can be found in the term *thick description* used by Geertz (1973) to describe an essential feature of a case study. Thus, the previous six chapters map many aspects of TY as an innovation. Opportunities and challenges, achievements and failures, problems and paradoxes have been identified and, to some extent, described and explained. Meanings have been extracted.

The research began with the question:

> What are the attitudes of the critical actors – students, teachers, parents and school leaders – towards TY and how do these attitudes manifest themselves in the operation of TY at six distinct school sites?

This chapter explores some of the findings from that stage of the research and attempts to assess their wider significance, particularly for policy.

The research proceeded to pose a second question:

> Based on insights from the first part of the research, what are the attitudes of senior personnel in key agencies involved in the shaping and making of educational policy towards Transition Year as in innovation in Irish post-primary schooling?

There is clear evidence emerging from both stages of the research that students, parents, teachers and school leaders, as well as policy makers and shapers, voice enthusiasm for aspects of TY. This indicates a positive embracing of TY as an

innovation in Irish schooling. Side by side with these positive dispositions, however, there is a pattern of reservations. These reservations are about aspects of the programme itself and about its place in the wider scheme of post-primary schooling. Sometimes, it will be demonstrated, reservations spill over into resistance which may be covert and unacknowledged.

A paradox is that such apparently conflicting attitudinal positions can be found in an individual student, parents, teacher or policy maker. This chapter also explores those tensions, seeking explanations for such ambiguities. To that end, a section on metaphor and image is included. Individually ambiguous positions regarding TY, it will be shown, arise partially from policy weaknesses. The equality perspective, in particular, is explored. As teachers are central players in the realisation, or not, of TY's ambition, their perspectives and needs receive particular attention. Thus, this chapter is concerned with themes of innovation, resistance and policy, not as three discreet topics but as interrelated ones.

Transition Year as an innovation

The evidence from the schools shows that TY succeeds in engaging mid-adolescents in their schooling in ways different from their experience in Junior Cycle. Young peoples' voices testify to how TY in the schools studied generates a new, more positive dynamic in the relationship between students and their teachers and among students themselves. Learning experiences beyond the classroom play a significant role in forging these improvements. In some cases, there is a perception that TY classes are more participative and democratic than the other five years of post-primary schooling. Teachers report that students mature during TY, a view strongly supported by parents. Many of the policy shapers and policy makers who were interviewed also articulate positive views about TY.

Alongside enthusiasm for TY and its achievements, there is a consistent pattern of reservations. This is clearly seen in the school profiles. The evidence shows how schools *domesticate* the programme to suit particular contexts, supporting Datnow's

(2002) concept of 'co-construction' and the large body of research that indicates how practitioners adapt, re-shape and modify educational innovations (House 1974; Eisner 1992; Sarason,1996; Fullan, 2001; McLaughlin 2006).

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Transition Year in four profiled schools

The evidence from the schools in Chapter 4 indicates how TY can contribute to growth in students' maturity, impact positively on the school climate and enthuse teachers, co-ordinators and principals professionally. A close reading of the data from the four sites also shows marked differences in how TY developed in each school. Gleeson *et al* (2003) also noted marked differences regarding the implementation of the LCA. Perhaps this is to be expected from schools where TY is 'well-regarded', or indeed, because, as an innovation, TY is strongly dependent on 'bottom-up' development. What is worth discussing is why TY appears to be more embedded into the cultures of Ash School and Beech School than in either Chestnut School or Sycamore School. As noted in Chapter 5, four activities were identified as contributing to coherence in TY: planning and writing the programme; communicating with parents; the role of the co-ordinator; and the quality of in-school leadership.

In Ash School, the Principal held a passionate belief about the value of the TY, delegated substantial authority to the co-ordinator – she described him as 'a mini-principal' and 'a super organiser' – and, before introducing TY, allocated substantial time for teachers to design and develop a school-specific programme. Significantly, she described this latter in terms of curriculum development.

In Beech School, teachers' beliefs about how disengaged many eLC students were from learning prompted them to explore TY's possibilities. In their context - designated 'disadvantaged' - they set about taking strong ownership of TY and re-writing the programme in language that made sense to their particular circumstances. Soon they saw a change, most noticeably in more positive student-

teacher relationships and, later, in terms of engagement with learning. Increased participation of students from Beech School in third-level education is seen as directly linked to the decision to embrace TY.

Enthusiasm and leadership were also evident in both Chestnut School and Sycamore School, though not to the same extent. The principals in both these schools frequently referred to the eLC results as the yardstick by which they believed schools are judged. Such a focus was much less evident with the principals in Ash School or Beech School.

There was another significant difference. Reference has already been made in Chapter 1 to the TY onion (TYCSS, 1998; Jeffers, 2007a, p.268). All four schools engaged in relevant, imaginative and challenging activities. The aims and philosophy of TY seemed most realised in the *outer* layer (once-off, calendar type items that involved learning beyond the classroom e.g. work experience, trips, musicals, community service). However, in Chestnut School and Sycamore School, the spirit of TY was less evident in the other three layers. Sinéad Breathnach's, SDPI, observation in Chapter 5, that, in her view, many schools' real engagement with TY is mainly on this outer, superficial layer seems especially relevant.

Democracy in action

As is evident in Chapter 4, students in each of the four schools reported a qualitative improvement in student-teacher relationships during TY. They also frequently spoke in negative terms about their experiences in Junior Cycle. The improvement was often linked to 'learning beyond the classroom' activities, reinforcing some of Eilis Humphrey's comments. In all four schools, teachers were perceived as more relaxed in TY and classes were regarded as more participative. A difference in the data is that in Ash School and in Beech School students were able to provide numerous

examples of active learning methodologies being used across subjects. Such references are less evident in data from Chestnut School or Sycamore School.

This combination of greater student participation in classes and the use by teachers of active teaching/learning methodologies contributes to more democratic classrooms. One is reminded of Anne Looney's comments that teachers need to like students and be open to their lifeworlds when the student voice says:

> 'He listens to us. And he kind of likes listening to our views and what we want to do … I think that's good teaching.'

> Deirdre, Fourth year, Ash School

At a policy level, there is no explicit reference to democratic classrooms in the TY guidelines and yet evidence of them in action seems an important indicator of the successful embedding of TY's values and philosophy. For teachers, the skill of facilitating learning in a more negotiated, participative democratic environment seems more likely to grow and develop when that teacher is given the freedom to engage in developing the TY curriculum.

Democratic classrooms also seem to be appropriate ways of realising the second half of the TY Mission: '… and to prepare them for their role as autonomous, participative and responsible members of society' (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c, p.4). In the discourse with both school personnel and policy shapers and policy makers, the tendency is to make more frequent reference to the first half of the mission: 'To promote the personal, social, educational and vocational development of pupils and…' (*ibid.* p.4), though frequently both goals get conflated into the single word 'maturity'. This lack of focus on what might be called the 'education for citizenship' dimension, reflects a long standing unease in Irish education with that concept (Hyland, 1993; Lynch, 2000; Gleeson and Munnelly, 2003; Jeffers, 2004b; Gleeson, 2004b). At the same time, these schools take the

'community service' dimension of TY quite seriously[1]. They also regularly invite in speakers from the wider community. Perhaps a telling, paradoxical feature of the timetables in three of the four schools - Ash School is the exception - is the absence of a direct follow-on from CSPE at Junior Cycle. This suggests fragmented thinking that sees TY – and its citizenship orientation - primarily in terms of the outer layer of the TY onion. Despite this, the possibilities of schools as sites of social integration and development are well illustrated through TY where student-student relationships tend to be more interactive than in any other year in the school. In some schools, the amount of timetabled classes that explore topics of social, political and cultural importance tends to be greater. The emergence in recent years of the *Young Social Innovators* (YSI) project is a powerful indicator of what is possible within the TY framework for increasing social awareness. The significance of YSI's origins being outside the formal schooling system is an issue that deserves further exploration.

Similarly, while work experience, and in the case of Ash School, community service, are major features of the TY calendar, there is no timetabled space for integrated follow-up work on a weekly basis. De-briefing after work experience provides rich opportunities for young people to engage in democratic classroom discussion and citizenship development (Watts, 1983; Ó Donnabháin, 1998; Jeffers, 2003b; Jeffers, 2006b). Not to timetable regular classes for preparation and de-briefing relating to work experience and community service in TY seems to be spurning major opportunities for learning.

As with many other aspects of TY, even in schools where TY is 'well regarded', opportunities to build on the Junior Cycle experience of CSPE, and to develop the curriculum to include classes where students learn to be 'autonomous, participative and responsible members of society' do not seem to be fully realised. While a

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[1] In addition to the evidence presented in Chapter 4, some of these schools have since embraced quite enthusiastically the *Young Social Innovators* (YSI) project, arguably the most imaginative 'education for citizenship' type project of the last decade.

variety of factors contribute to this, the range of attitudinal positions found in schools and the associated micro-politics undoubtedly contribute to the cultures of schools. Thus, embracing some aspects of TY – for example, developing learning outside conventional classrooms – is accompanied by resistance, or at least indifference, to other features of the programme.

An innovation in a fragmented system

Ambiguous thinking about aspects of the TY programme within schools is mirrored by fragmented thinking about TY as part of a six-year cycle. The student data in this study is particularly strong in underlining how TY is perceived differently from the rest of schooling. Their views, and the varied explanations of policy shapers and makers to this observation, reveal that TY is generally seen as a programme apart, characterised by discontinuity rather than complementarity.

The persistence of fragmentation and discontinuity within post-primary schooling is a theme which Gleeson (2004) develops and provides extensive supporting evidence for. He asserts that:

> Much of this prevailing fragmentation is promoted by considerations of power, control and protection of sectoral interests (Gleeson, 2004, p.112).

'Ring-fenced' into a 'parallel universe', keeps TY isolated from what precedes it – the JC - or what follows it. Fragmentation and incoherence has emerged as a continuous strand in this study. Some of this lack of coherence arises from poor articulation in official policy on continuity and relationships between JC, TY, LCA and the established eLC. This absence of policy clarity manifests itself at school level with the prevailing hegemony of JC/eLC examination programmes and the marginalisation of TY. The challenge for school leaders to bring coherence to the TY programme within an individual school context is especially daunting (Jeffers, 2007a, p. 273). This policy uncertainty also impacts on teachers so that - TY's

aspirations to interdisciplinary work notwithstanding - they are likely to adopt a type of JC-eLC orientation as a default position. The relatively few examples of cross-curricular modules in the four schools studied is a reminder of how much educational confidence and courage is required to devise, teach and assess genuinely interdisciplinary work in the school system as it currently operates. The possibility of devising imaginative cross-curricular modules is a distinct opportunity and challenge arising from the NCCA's Transition Units framework.

For some young people and their parents, a consequence of fragmentation, discontinuity and incoherence is a somewhat bemused view of TY as a slightly unreal, parallel universe, disconnected from the perceived 'core business' of schooling : achieving in certificate examinations. In this context, it becomes relatively easy for the more instrumentalist and pragmatic to dismiss TY as irrelevant. Data in Chapter 6 demonstrate how fragmentation generates concerns of territoriality and legitimacy among support services. Furthermore, in that environment of boundaries and demarcation, TY has clearly slipped down the agenda of some agencies and been marginalised in others. Despite Cromien's (2000) trenchant criticisms of fragmented thinking and practice within the DES, Gleeson's (2004) illustrations of the negative impact of sectoral competition on curriculum development; and Granville's (2005) analysis and practical suggestions for more coherent support for schools, the evidence in this study suggests that the tradition of fragmentation is robust, persistent and resilient.

Tensions associated with Transition Year

In exploring these twin themes of innovation and resistance, it is worth recalling that ambiguity and tensions have been associated with TY from the outset. The first evaluation (Egan and O'Reilly 1978) identified strains within the programme itself that have persisted. In the current study, students continually contrast their TY experiences with those in other years, especially 3rd, 5th and 6th years. Teachers are of the opinion that TY has positive effects on the school climate (Jeffers, 2007a, p.

95).

As has been highlighted, 'the aims and philosophy of TY should permeate the whole school' (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c). The evidence that some aspects of schooling are more pervious that others prompts the chart 7.1, below, that indicates the main axes of tension between TY orientations and the underlying thrusts within established programmes. In practice, each axis should be regarded as a continuum, with schools – and individual teachers – positioning themselves at a particular point along each axis. The third column identifies possible steps that might facilitate greater integration of TY-type practices in other years.

TABLE 7.1. AXES OF TENSIONS WITHIN TY

Aspiration or practice within TY programmes	Thrust or direction of established practice and, sometimes, policies	Examples of changes that might enable TY values to permeate further into the life of the school
Learning-led	Examination driven	Greater emphasis on formative assessment within schools.
School-based curriculum construction	Centrally devised	More time for professional collaboration among teachers.
Interdisciplinary work	Subject independence	Inter-subject conversations about learning
Negotiated learning	Students sometimes say they are not listened to.	Leaders and teachers should seek students' evaluations about their learning.
Active learning	Passive absorption of data	More active methodologies and emphasis on experiential learning
Collaboration among teachers	Individual isolation	Facilitation of and preparation for more team teaching
School-based assessment	Examination driven	More portfolio-type assessment

As explored later in relation to teacher development, these tensions spring from curricular thrusts but also from conceptualisations of teacher identity.

A variety of attitudinal positions on Transition Year

Embracing innovation - while at the same time resisting it - is related to underlying assumptions and beliefs. Based on this case study and the researcher's tacit knowledge, it is possible to indicate some particular attitudinal positions regarding TY. Three perspectives are presented: those of parents, students and teachers. This model is offered to illustrate the complexity of views that impact on TY activities. The model also attempts to connect beliefs and behaviour. In any one school, each teacher as well as each student (and her/his parents) may adopt a particular position. This attitudinal complexity impacts on the classroom climate as well as on the overall culture of the school.

In interpreting the following charts, it is worth remembering that this attempts to identify *some* positions. It is not a comprehensive model. Reading horizontally A-G (parents), H-K (students) and L-R (teachers), the first line refers to the predominant attitude of the particular player. The next layer suggests the most likely 'underlying belief/concern' that informs the position. Again, it is indicative and not the only explanation. Thirdly, 'possible dispositions' points towards a further level. Here – and this is a broad category– is an attempt to imagine some of the feelings that might be generated by, or towards, TY. Again, this is incomplete and there are a number of different possibilities in each category. In the case of teachers, some possible behaviour is suggested. Finally, in each situation there may be totally different explanations for a students's behaviour.

If one views this from the perspective of, say, a TY co-ordinator, firstly there is her/his own position/beliefs/dispositions and behaviour. S/he then, in the course of a typical day, may encounter a variety of students, parents and colleagues. Each will have his or her own attitude to TY. For advocates of TY – such as co-ordinators – an important point of these three grids is that positions are not necessarily fixed. Indeed, there is clear evidence from the parents in this study, from the students and from some of the interviews with school leaders that people move among the positions. The effects of TY on young people can impact strongly on parents'

attitudes. Students' own experiences of the programme can also lead to them re-appraising their perceptions of TY and of schooling.

TABLE 7.2. SOME PARENTAL ATTITUDINAL POSITIONS ON TRANSITION YEAR

Position	A. Insufficient information about TY	B. TY is harmful	C. TY is divisive	D. TY is a waste of time
Typical comments	I don't know much about it.	S/he lost the study habit in TY.	TY is only for some kids.	A doss year. Not enough homework
Possible underlying beliefs/concerns	Ranges from enthusiasm to not believing it is their business	Strong custodial view of schooling	The system is unfair.	Schooling's main job is academic development.
Possible dispositions	Feeling disempowered Frustration Anger	Anger Frustration	Acceptance Resentment Feeling conflicted	Apprehension Frustration Anger
Other possibilities	Don't attend meetings	Son/daughter may be going through a difficult adolescence. Resents compulsion.	Would prefer a 5-year cycle. Parents favour it but their children don't.	Would prefer a 5 year cycle. Students do not engage with TY. School programme is weak.

	E. TY boosts points	F. TY is uneven	G. TY advances maturity
Typical comments	Research shows it boosts eLC achievement.	It's very good for some things.	They grow up a lot during TY.
Possible underlying beliefs/concerns	Strong instrumental view of schooling	Unsure about TY's purposes	School should aim at balanced development.
Possible dispositions	Positive to TY as extension of eLC. Somewhat tolerant of 'deviation'	Limited enthusiasm plus frustration	Enthusiasm, especially for 'novel' aspects of TY
Other possibilities	Very high career aspirations for their children	Limited faith in school's capacity	Negative experiences with children during early adolescence

TABLE 7.3. SOME STUDENT ATTITUDINAL POSITIONS ON TRANSITION YEAR

Position	H. TY is a waste of time	I. TY boosts points	J. TY is uneven	K. TY advances maturity
Typical comments	A doss year You do nothing. They make it up as they go along. I want to get out of school quickly.	It helps you in your exams.	Some bits are OK, others are not.	You grow up a lot in TY.
Underlying beliefs/concerns	School is about achieving in exams. Schooling is something you have to do.	Exam achievement is an important goal of schooling	School is to help you grow up. Schools fail to live up to expectations.	School is to help you grow up.
Possible dispositions	Lack of engagement Alienation	Sees it very much as a 3 year eLC	Partial engagement	Enthusiasm, especially for 'novel' aspects of TY (the outer layer of the TY onion)
Other possibilities	Apprehensive about difference from JC. Not keen on work that TY involves. Keen to move to eLC.	Highly motivated learner	Not clear on goals of TY School programme weak.	Does not like academic work.

TABLE 7.4. SOME TEACHER ATTITUDINAL POSITIONS ON TRANSITION YEAR

Position	L. TY is divisive	M. TY is a waste of time	N. TY boosts points	O. TY is uneven
Typical comments	TY exacerbates existing inequalities in the system.	A doss year They lose the study habit. Not enough resources	Research shows it boosts eLC achievement.	It's very good in theory but…
Underlying beliefs/concerns	Schooling is a vehicle for promoting equality.	Schooling's main job is academic development	Strong instrumental view of schooling	Unsure about individual school's capacity to innovate
Possible dispositions	Anger Frustration Resentful Feeling conflicted	Apprehensive Frustration	Positive to TY as extension of eLC. Somewhat tolerant of 'deviation'	Limited enthusiasm plus frustration. Limited sense of agency
Teacher behaviour	Avoidance Limited engagement Resistance	Avoidance Limited engagement Critical .	Links TY closely with eLC in discourse and in teaching.	Critical of in-school arrangements. Critical of DES
Other possibilities	Should be compulsory for all	Abolish it. A 3-year eLC. LCA is more appropriate. Concern with discipline issues My time is scarce. TY is very demanding.	TY experiences improve student motivation.	Lack of coherence between JC-TY-LCA-eLC

Typical comments	P. TY advances maturity	Q. TY promotes self-directed learning	R. TY is a model for reforming the system
Underlying beliefs/concerns	Students mature well during TY.	They become mature and independent learners.	There should be more of this in JC-eLC.
Possible dispositions	More holistic education needed in schools	Learning to learn is a key goal of schooling.	JC-eLC need reform towards more active learning and different student-teacher relationships.
Teacher behaviour	Engaged Enthusiasm especially for 'novel' aspects of TY . Values more informal student-relationship	Values opportunities for curriculum development. Shows enthusiasm for NCCA proposals. Engaged and inventive	Enthusiasm. Frustration with TY as 'parallel universe'. Engaged. Discourse is critical of status quo. Activist
Other possibilities	A break from exam pressure is welcome.	TY as preparation for 3rd level study	Does not enjoy teaching examination classes.

Parents' questions about Transition Year

While the attitudes of students and teachers dominate the data and inform much of the rest of this chapter, parents' attitudes to TY are also worth exploring. Such attitudes, perhaps the most reliable indicator in this study about wider public attitudes, can be grouped under two broad headings.

Firstly, and for some this can be very frustrating, parents state that they have limited information about TY, particularly its rationale. They would like more information and they would like schools to involve them more in formal, structured dialogue about TY, and other aspects of schooling. This resonates with a concluding comment from another Irish study.

> If parents do not demand or ask for information they are not offered it. If parents do not know what questions to ask, no one tells them what they need to know to make an informed judgement for their child's future. The justice of ignorance is a major issue not being addressed in education (Lyons *et al*, 2003, p.382).

Secondly, in the schools where TY is well regarded, parents tend to view the impact of TY on their maturity of their sons and daughter very positively. Those who may have had reservations at the outset of the programme, invariably point to the observed outcomes. That is not to say parents don't have questions about TY. Indeed, the interview with the representative of the National Parents Council, Post-Primary, Marion Lyon, reveals an extensive list of issues that concern parents. For example, unease about the perceptions of the quality of TY programme in some all-boys schools is close to the top of that list.

Parents' enthusiasm for TY is often couched in a language that regards much of schooling as outdated and inappropriate for 21st century Ireland. They tend to indicate that schools are not changing fast enough to meet the demands of a rapidly changing society. Parents frequently cite work experience, the emphasis on personal and social development, on learning teamwork and perceptions of better student-

teacher relations as features of TY that they value. This attitude highlights some of the current challenges facing schools, some of which were presented in Chapter 2. The focus groups with parents also reveal how parents struggle to find the language to voice their concerns for their children's growth, development and education. There is a consciousness that greater opportunities exist than when they themselves left school. The also perceive the world as a more complex, faster moving place, where potential rewards are greater but where pitfalls abound. Some indicate a pragmatic, instrumentalist view of schooling of the 'work hard in order to pass your exams in order to get a good job' variety. A few show how concepts of 'learning to learn' and 'lifelong learning' are growing in popularity.

TY in historical context

Ambiguous attitudes to TY since 1974 are illuminated by some attention to the wider social and schooling contexts in which the programme has found itself.

Curriculum debate in post-primary education has grappled with the weight of the classical humanist tradition (OECD, 1991, p.69). When Richard Burke TD, a former teacher, became Minister for Education in 1973 he indicated an interest in curriculum matters. In particular, Burke demonstrated an awareness of the need for curricular responses to the more diverse student population consequent on the introduction 'free' education in 1967. As Minister he could see the dramatically increasing participation rates flowing directly from the O'Malley initiative to abolish school fees and introduce a free school transport scheme and a limited 'free' book scheme. When interviewed in 2001, Burke recalled the journalist John Healy's image of the bright new yellow buses as a constant reminder that a social revolution was under way. Burke knew that change was needed in 'styles of teaching', in 'the quality of the learning materials' and in 'the very organisation of the school itself'.

The vision of the full cohort of young people having, by right, the real possibility of access to second-level schooling was a pivotal event in 20th century Ireland. In hindsight, it seems that the curricular implications were underestimated[2]. Indeed, the various policy debates and initiatives relating to second-level schooling during the subsequent 40 years can be read as an attempt to come to grips with the sea-change. For example, initiatives such as the expansion of the eLC examination to VEC schools; the dropping of the requirement to pass Irish in the eLC; the TY initiative; the setting up of the CEB; and, in particular, its early policy documents; the ending of the Group Certificate and the Intermediate Certificate; the emergence of the Junior Certificate; and the re-structuring of senior cycle, with the mainstreaming of LCA, LCVP and TY can all trace their impetus back to O'Malley's initiative. Furthermore, the shadow of that innovation extends into the 1992 Green Paper, the National Education Convention, the 1995 White Paper and the legislation from 1998 onwards that, *inter alia*, has led to the changed institutional landscape that now includes a statutory National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, a State Examinations Commission and a Teaching Council.

Burke's 'solo-run' proposal of TY in 1974 surprised the educational community – including his own officials. He had no illusions that TY, his 'subversive idea', could easily have been scrapped. His decision to 'guard it in a regulatory fashion' was politically astute. Stitching TY into the fabric of the *Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools* ensured its survival. Official policy towards TY was ambiguous and, at times, indifferent. The boost in numbers taking part in the programme in the mid-eighties was more by accident than by design. There was limited advocacy for TY, though new guidelines (CEB, 1986a) did

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[2] According to Lee (1989, p.362) O'Malley's sudden death in 1968, at the age of forty-seven, took much of the momentum from many of the Minister's initiatives, including free education. He refers to the interview given by the former Secretary of the Department of Education, Seán O'Connor, to Christina Murphy 'How O'Malley launched free scheme' in *Irish Times*, 10 September 1986 . The suggestion is that the initiative was not followed up adequately and that the impetus went out of the commitment to education with the resignation of Lemass and the death of O'Malley. The failure to provide adequate resources to support the free education scheme is lamented.

add weight and substance to the programme. However, had it been scrapped at any time in its first twenty years, few might have wept at its passing and it would have become little more than a footnote in curriculum history. Anne Looney's question, posed at the end of Chapter 6, wondering if there had not been a TY programme would reform of the eLC be regarded with greater urgency, deserves consideration. The impact of the OECD (1991) review and the availability of resources through the European Social Fund provided some impetus for re-structuring schooling at Senior Cycle from 1994. But again, ambiguous attitudes at policy level resulted in arrangements regarding TY, LCA, LCVP and the eLC being discussed primarily in technicist, managerial terms. Noticeably absent was a clear articulation of the curricular relationships – especially continuity – between the programmes. TY's optional character has also been problematic from the outset.

While new guidelines extended the ambition of TY so that its aims and philosophy should 'permeate the entire school' (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c, p.4), they failed to adequately locate TY in its schooling context. Indeed, in attempting to insulate TY from examination pressure, the guidelines state the programme's relationship with the eLC initially in negative terms.

> A Transition Year is NOT part of the Leaving Certificate programme and should NOT be seen as an opportunity for spending three years rather than two studying Leaving certificate material. (*ibid,* p.5)

This sentence is followed by proposing a more ambiguous – and somewhat subservient - relationship between the programmes with 'eLC programme content' 'not absolutely excluded' from TY. Ambiguity gives way to confusion – and possible insult – when the guidelines reveal a tension that, as is evident throughout this research, still persists. For example, John MacGabhann, TUI, alluded to a widespread belief among many people that 'the Leaving Certificate should be brutal' and 'will toughen you up'. References by Eilis Humphreys, LDS, and Moira Leyden, ASTI, to TY as 'fun' and Chief Inspector Eamon Stack's view of eLC as

subject-focused, and TY as student-centred also illustrate the tension. The key sentence is:

> When Leaving Certificate material is chosen for study it should be done on the clear understanding that it is to be explored in an original and stimulating way that is significantly different from the way it would have been treated in the two years to Leaving Certificate (*ibid*. p.6).

It is evident throughout this study that such policy tension has contributed to confusion on the part of teachers and schools, especially in continuity subjects such as Mathematics and Gaeilge. The ever present danger of TY being 'colonised by the eLC' discussed in an earlier work (Jeffers, 2007a, p.265, p.302, p.305) is compounded by that section in the guidelines[3]. Poorly articulated curriculum policy also seems to contribute to fragmentation and lack of coherence within TY programmes (*ibid.* pp.259, 261,273 sqq, 280, 297). For example, what constitutes breadth and balance within TY?

The extent to which mainstreaming TY eased or altered the 'enormous' weight of the classical humanist tradition (OECD, 1991, p. 69) has been limited. NCCA proposals for senior cycle education, including the development of Transition Units, can be read as a further attempt to address the problem so succinctly stated by the OECD. Whether policy makers will learn from these experiences is unclear. More than a decade ago Granville wrote:

> The failure to disseminate successful innovation and to apply research findings has been one of the most frustrating aspects of curriculum development in Ireland over the last twenty years. Despite numerous evaluation reports and advocacy from many sources, the mainstream national curriculum remained unaffected by the innovations taking place within pilot projects and within schools (Granville, 1995, p.144).

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[3] This critique is not meant to imply that simple solutions are at hand. Furthermore, as explained in Chapter 1, this section of the 1993 guidelines are, arguably an advance on the crude reference in the 1986 document to 'between 30% and 50% of the time should comprise traditional and/or academic studies' which many decoded as spending about 40% of TY time on LC material.

In reviewing TY's historical development, Anne Looney's questioning along the lines of 'what if TY had never happened' is particularly engaging. Her contention that TY, as 'the' site of innovation, creativity and imagination, might have contributed to a lack of development at JC and eLC level, while speculative, may have some validity. The evidence throughout this study suggests that a two-way flow operates: while TY impacts on the rest of the school so does the individual school, its traditions, ethos and culture, shape how TY manifests itself. While, improved student-teacher relationships, more participative classrooms and a more energised student body seem to be TY effects that go beyond the confines of 4th year, there is little evidence that, for example, teachers of TY employ greater use of experiential learning methods or, indeed, innovative teaching in their classes throughout the other five years. The hegemony of the eLC and JC exams is such that TY does appear as a type of parallel universe, disconnected from the rest of schooling. As an innovation depending on extensive 'bottom-up' development, TY stands in contrast to much of the 'top-down' thrust of recent initiatives. This status may further increase its vulnerability.

Juggling metaphors

As the research progressed and the number of paradoxes associated with TY became more obvious, what Stake (1995, p.20) refers to as an emic issue, arose. The researcher realised that this been an unspoken, underlying interest even prior to starting the work. When he was visiting schools as part of the support service for TY in the second half of the 1990s, this writer was captivated by the varied metaphors which principals, teachers and students used to describe TY, as well as other aspects of schooling. Some of the attraction was the colourfulness of the language but there was also a sense that perhaps these metaphors expressed something about underlying assumptions, values and beliefs. For example, in Chapter 5, at one stage the Chief Inspector, Eamon Stack, likens a school devising its TY programme to cooking a meal. Later he talks about 'staying on track'. This latter image carries mechanistic connotations and is close to a frequently used metaphor in relation to school

leadership: that of 'running a tight ship'. Thus, creative and innovative approaches to the curriculum may be in competition with values of order, predictability, and efficiency.

The decision to explore informants' use of image and metaphor became an additional feature of the research. From the Greek, metaphor literally means to 'carry over' or to 'carry across'. A metaphor is like a bridge, linking the unknown or unfamiliar to the known and familiar. Some examples can throw light (itself a metaphor – there is no actual light here) on the subject. Gleeson (1989) in critiquing the introduction of the Junior Certificate subtitled his paper: *Trojan Horse or Mickey Mouse?* The rich, familiar connotations of both terms conjure up contrasting possibilities and engage the reader. They also imply a polarity, i.e. that the JC is either one or the other when, like all innovations, it is somewhere on a spectrum. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explored a number of basic conceptual metaphors such as 'life is a journey', 'organisations are plants, 'argument is war', 'time is money'. They highlight how in the above examples the familiarity and concreteness of the second half of these phrases invokes certain assumptions and then invite the reader to apply them to the abstract first part of the phrase. Used this way, our perceptions of the abstract concepts are shaped and modified. Lakoff and Johnson also show how metaphors are powerful tools in rhetorical speech and for political propagandists. Hence, the feeling of a slight unease generated in this researcher when TY is described as a 'flagship of our education system', with a reminder of the observation that slogans are often used as substitutes for debate in Irish education. Gleeson (2004, p.105 sqq), for example, cites various authorities on the neglect of social studies and education research in Ireland and the prevalence of anti-intellectual mindsets. The power of a root metaphor lies in the underlying worldview that shapes an individual's understanding of a situation. It is often a fundamental, unspoken, unacknowledged assumption.

Briefly, prior to the fourteenth century, according to Hodas (2001) metaphors rarely referred to the created world. That changed with the invention of the clock. This was an invention, a human creation with enough complexity to mirror aspects of the natural world. People began to speak about the 'regulation' of affairs and the ordered 'workings' of matters. As Hodas puts it:

> The clock, with its numerous intricate, precise, and interlocking components, a felicitous ability to corporealize the abstraction of temporality, shaped western perceptions of the world by serving as its chief systemic metaphor for the next five hundred years (Hodas, 2001).

Images of intricacy and precision shift to those of 'drive' and 'power' with the arrival of the engine in the early nineteenth century. Sophisticated machinery of the twentieth century led to the image of the self-regulating machine, a 'system' which has within it the means of both its own perpetuity and governance. This metaphor is applied to everything from nature to the human body, the human mind, politics, the family and the school. There are signs that concepts of drive and regulation are giving way to ones of processing and transmission, reflecting the emergence of new metaphors for complex systems drawn from the world of information technology. The seepage of the language of hardware, software, paths, pointers, virtual networks into everyday life has, Hodas argues, tremendous consequences for notions of property, originality, authorship, privacy and the social construction of relationships. This reflects the shift from a mechanical to a digital organisation of society with significant consequences for the organisation of schooling. This point is made to emphasise the significance of metaphor in how people understand the world and organise and articulate their thoughts.

Applying this analysis to schools, and TY in particular, can be instructive. Collins (2007, p.90) explores the underpinning assumptions of four metaphors of schooling: custody, factory, service centre and community. The custodial metaphor sometimes manifests itself in the language of care that suggests the school as sharing features of the hospital. On other occasions the language implies that prison is the model with the language of discipline and even punishment. Indeed, John MacGabhann's reference in Chapter 5 to the eLC as 'brutality' suggests the latter perspective. So

too does he use of the term 'loosening the rope' or Mary McGlynn's reference to TY being 'outside the box'. Even more disturbing language in this custodial category, not unknown, is of school as zoo! The language of processing raw material to result products – the factory model – is most commonly used in school contexts regarding examinations with value-added 'products' being measured in 'points'. The school as service centre suggests customers, much like a supermarket, or a petrol station, or a bank (with echoes of Friere) where they 'buy' their schooling. Fourthly, the community model has been expounded at length in Chapter 2. Discourse analysis suggests at least two further major categories: that of organic growth – images of gardening (TY as a delicate plant in Chapter 1; images of 'acorn to oak'; the language of nurturing), and that of construction (work in progress, scaffoldings). Based on his four models, Collins then offers the following framework:

TABLE 7.5 MODELS OF SCHOOL –UNDERPINNING ASSUMPTIONS, *AFTER COLLINS, 2007, P.90*

	Custody	**Factory**	**Service Centre**	**Community**
Student is	Inmate	Raw material	Customer	Member
Outcome	Rehabilitated	Competitive	Satisfied	Contributor
Order	Care and punishment	Mechanistic	Customer choice	Organic
Role of teacher	Custodian	Delivers	Serves	Facilitates
Social project	Compliant	Useful	Informed customer	Responsible
Learning project	Behaviour modification	Follow instructions	Attains personal goals	Multiple intelligences

From a schooling perspective the value of exploring metaphor lies in the underlying worldview contained in the way they are used. In general, TY enthusiasts prefer the organic growth images that convey the core goal of 'increased maturity'[4]. A striking theme throughout the data from schools and from the policy makers and policy

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[4] There are numerous other examples. Two from school principals will illustrate this. One principal said 'We give them milk on Mondays, we give them milk on Tuesdays, we give them milk on Wednesdays. You want to give them orange juice on Thursdays and then expect them to return to milk on Fridays and Saturdays', with the six days referring to the six years through second-level. Another likened school to a journey through the forest, usually at breakneck speed. He saw TY as an opportunity to dismount, stretch one's legs, admire the surrounding forest before resuming the journey, refreshed.

shapers is of 'TY as different', as being disconnected from the mainstream, of being peripheral to 'the core business '. Hence the application of the phrase 'parallel universe' as an attempt to describe TY as a world apart, not intersecting with the world of mainstream schooling.

As will be seen later, early resistors to TY coined the dismissive phrase 'a doss year' tapping into deeply held assumptions of schooling, including 'school as brutality', already mentioned. 'Dossing' also connotes 'taking it easy', 'being lazy' and 'being irresponsible'. Such dispositions run contrary to the spirit of competitive individualism that is a characteristic of advanced western capitalism, and as a dominant view of schooling. Despite the many positive outcomes for some individuals of education, competition for advantage is the governing norm within the field (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Lynch 1989). There is evidence that the rise of a globalised knowledge economy has intensified the competition. TY's underpinning values run counter to such a worldview and so it becomes a target for negative, rhetorical, emotive slogans.

Analysis of metaphor can also be especially revealing of the cultures of school discussed in Chapter 2. For this researcher, Sergiovanni's image of 'school as community' is potent and very relevant to TY. Indeed, a key point in the writing of Sergiovanni (1994, 1996, 2005) concerns the metaphors we use for school. He remarks:

> Deep changes in schools are difficult to achieve when using change forces that emerge from views of schools as formal bureaucratic organisations, formal organic organisations or markets. This difficulty is exacerbated by the negative effects which constrained theories and practices can have on teachers. Instead of nurturing professional community, constrained views breed cynicism, erode civic virtue and encourage the development of human nature's passionate side at the expense of human nature's rational side. Yet the voluminous literature on change in schools gives scant attention to this mindscape problem.
>
> In sum, mindscapes are expressed as idea systems. Idea systems become language systems. Language systems, in turn, become thought systems. And finally thought systems become action systems. Thus changing the

way we engage in the process of change in schools may have less to do with the particulars of a given strategy than it does with the fundamental idea systems that frame our views of schools as entities and our views of the nature of human nature (Sergiovanni, 2005, p.313).

Metaphors' relevance to understanding schools as organisations and attitudes towards TY extends to teachers' construction of their own identities. Ryan (2005), engaging in a reflective practice project with primary teachers, found that combining the metaphors and images that they use with their biographical routes and personal histories seemed greatly to enlighten the professional perspectives' of the participants. Her conclusion of teachers holding complementary and contradictory metaphors of their work will be shown to be especially relevant to TY as will the exploration of the metaphors used by teachers. As she remarks: 'The practice of teaching was viewed in terms of juggling a diversity of roles.' (Ryan, 2005, p.183).

Ryan found that participants' preferred images of teacher and pupil appeared to have formed in resistance to the teaching and learning strategies they had experienced in their early formative years.

> Remembering the fear that had characterized their learning, the lack of opportunity for creativity and how children 'with problems' had often been overlooked, many of these teachers has resolved that their pupils' schooling experiences would be 'different'. Indeed, the caring, supportive, activity-based roles implied in their images bore little resemblances to the autocratic teaching regimes they recalled (Ryan, 2005, p.192).

Ryan's point about 'juggling a diversity of roles' is especially relevant to teachers of TY. When her insight is combined with the discussion on Collins' perspective one can see how, in the course of any working day, as well as operating *in loco* parentis, an individual teacher can play the role of custodian, carer, deliverer, gardener, author, entertainer, salesperson, bricklayer, judge and social worker. As an ASTI advertising slogan some years ago put it: 'Teachers teach more than you know!' Learning to live with such paradoxes and to juggle the metaphors is part of the professional demands made of teachers and derives strongly from the 'pile of purposes' discussed in Chapter 2.

Listening to educational debates, for example at the annual Conferences of the teacher unions, one can see how advocates of a particular viewpoint tend to employ a single metaphor of the teacher, rather than the complexity involved in 'juggling the metaphors'. TY, with its distinct emphasis on personal and social development contrasts strongly with the pressures of what has been called 'the points race' and thus, places in sharp relief the need for the professional teacher to learn to juggle the metaphors.

Within education there is a great tension between valuing what is unique, distinctive and individual – so central to learning and teaching – and maintaining the regular, structured and patterned life of a school or an entire system. This tension eschews certainty, accepts ambiguity and recognises that there are many different pathways through the forest of understanding. Thus, teachers are able to both welcome TY and resist it at the same time.

The extensive use of metaphor in relation to TY perhaps reflects the paradoxical nature of so much practice surrounding schooling: ambiguity is to be expected. Learning to live with apparent contradictions is inherent in being a professional educator.

> Paradoxes are like the weather, something to be lived with, not solved, the worst aspects mitigated, the best enjoyed and used as clues to the way forward. Paradox has to be accepted, coped with and made sense of, in life, in work, in community and among the nations (Handy, 1994, p.18).

Resistance to Transition Year

 In reporting on the first part of this research to the DES (Jeffers, 2007a), a key point was that schools *domesticated* TY. To understand resistance, and how its can be linked with the partial embracing of an innovation, this concept of domestication needs some explanation.

The research showed how the individual history of TY within a school – how it was originally conceived and developed – plays a crucial role in determining its current standing. This can be seen in the profiles of Ash School, Beech School, Chestnut School and Sycamore School in the current study. Each school adapted the TY *Guidelines* to suit its own vision of what it sees as most appropriate for its students as well as for the school as an institution with its own distinct ethos and culture. This *domestication* – the word literally means 'to make fond of home life' - is used in the sense that schools adapt and shape TY to integrate it into their existing priorities and practices. They tend to emphasise those aspects of TY that 'fit' with their tradition and sense of identity. Furthermore, domestication also implies 'taming' and the evidence points to schools tending to downplay or even omit aspects of TY that are particularly challenging. There are resonances with Datnow's (2002, p.223) remarks that 'local adaptation' takes place continually with an innovation. She used the phrase 'co-construction' to illustrate the phenomenon.

Ash School, an all-girls school and the only one of the four case study sites where TY is compulsory, has a programme that has been driven by a principal and co-ordinator who believe strongly in its developmental value for students and teachers. In Beech School - a co-educational community college, designated 'disadvantaged' at the time of the data gathering and now part of the DEIS scheme - the school leadership sees a clear relationship between TY's promotion of personal, social and intellectual development and increased participation by their students in third–level education. In Sycamore School, a co-educational community school, and in Chestnut School, an all-boys voluntary secondary school, the emphasis when talking about TY tends to be on how, as well as promoting all-round maturity, TY also appears to contribute strongly to the school's academic achievements.

This domestication or co-construction of TY can be seen as each school putting its own distinctive local shape on the TY programme, of power devolving from the DES to the local school. At its most positive, TY can be viewed as a national programme with sufficient flexibility to enable genuine accommodation to the

specific circumstances of individual schools, respecting their particular histories, traditions, values and contexts, playing to the strengths of teaching teams and geared to the developmental needs of students. However, *domestication* can also be viewed less favourably. The flexibility within TY that facilitates imagination and creativity can also be invoked by schools to justify a narrow selectivity that ignores key features of the programme. In each school in this study there is evidence of the non-implementation of particular features of the *Guidelines*. Specific omissions, as can be seen in the school profiles in Chapter 4, include interdisciplinary work, appropriate modes of assessment and the provision of health education. Thus, the freedom for individual schools for 'selection and adaptation' regarding TY is both a strength and a weakness. This domesticating of TY, does not involve overt manifestation of resistance. Resistance to aspects of TY is subtle, inadvertent and, not necessarily, discussed explicitly within a school.

However, if a level of domestication is the norm in schools where TY is 'well regarded' one can imagine how the programme might be modified where attitudinal positioning along the spectrum outlined in Table 7.4, above, might be less enthusiastic of TY. Indeed, some of the WSE reports on the DES website (www.education.ie) , as mentioned in the interview with Eamon Stack in Chapter 5, indicate as much.

What Moira Leydon, ASTI, acknowledged regarding anti-intellectual tendencies among teachers may also be a factor in resistance to TY. Given the ambiguous attitudes, as already shown, in official rhetoric regarding TY, one can hardly expect all teachers to reconcile the conflicting strands.

Resistance and the shadow of the established Leaving Certificate Examination
In examining resistance to TY, as well as appreciating the phenomenon of domestication, another finding from the first part of this study deserves scrutiny. That is the fact that 'the danger of TY being colonised by the established Leaving

Certificate is ever present' (Jeffers, 2007b p.32). As evident in Tables 7.2, 7.3 and 7.4 the eLC – and the associated point system - is a key reference point in second-level schooling and casts a backward shadow on all that precedes it. The principals in Sycamore School and Chestnut School were quite explicit that results in eLC are, in practice, critical reference points for their understanding of schooling. TY's goals then become subservient to those of the eLC. Domestication takes place with at least one eye on the eLC. This is also the way for many teachers. Thus, again, it is not so much that resistance to TY manifests itself in open hostility. Rather, TY is located in the wider context where, frequently, eLC achievements dominate. In some cases, resistance to TY – especially to its more challenging features – is almost unconscious and couched in phrases such as 'one has to prioritise and my Leaving Cert. class is No. 1' with more than a suggestion that TY is far down the list. A value of Table 7.4 is that it enables teachers to interrogate their own position.

Often, the lack of time for planning and preparation is put forward by teachers, co-ordinators and principals as the practical inhibitor of greater implementation of aspects of TY. Teachers' responses to the NCCA survey in April 2007, outlined in Chapter 6, indicate that 'time' is a major consideration for many as they contemplate the introduction of Transition Units. However, the perspectives put forward in Chapter 2, by House on 'cognitive structure'; by Sarason regarding 'existing regularities' and 'power relationships'; and by Eisner on the nine factors that contribute to schools' robustness, are also relevant when trying to understand resistance.

The security of the familiar

Eisner's (1992, p.610) observation that 'teachers are often reluctant to relinquish teaching repertoires that provide an important source of security for them' is an understandable factor in covert resistance to TY. There are also echoes of Sugrue's observation among Irish primary teachers:

> Within the emotional maelstrom of contemporary classrooms' in particular, teachers may instinctively cling to established pedagogical

formats with a view to reducing complexity and uncertainty (Sugrue, 1997, p x).

The implication is that teachers may not be particularly aware of their own resistance to TY or the extent to which they might be part of the problem faced by those keen to develop TY. As is evident in Chapter 5, those who have worked in school leadership positions such as Eilis Humphreys, Mary McGlynn and Sinéad Breathnach, indicate a keen awareness of how restricting existing timetable arrangements can be for TY. The programme offers opportunities to break out of well-established moulds. Trant and Ó Donnabháin describe the school timetable as 'a masterpiece of nineteenth century efficiency'. They continue:

> The traditional timetable is still largely unchallenged and not only exerts a constraining influence on the creative life of the school, but is also the official instrument used for purposes of educational accountancy. Whatever is not on the timetable, does not exist (Trant and Ó Donnabháin, 1998, p.77)

Thus, citing 'timetable restrictions' as an excuse for not engaging in particular aspects of TY is an example of resistance based on adherence to the *status quo*[5].

For those post-primary teachers whose identity and status is closely linked with the achievements of their students in eLC examinations, TY may hold little attraction. They may request not to be timetabled for TY. If allocated classes, they may be inclined towards domesticating the subject/module to fit with an eLC syllabus, with an established 'teaching repertoire'. This TY/eLC tension is perhaps seen most dramatically in the advertising material for 'grind schools'. These institutions usually don't offer a TY programme at all and in one case (Ashfield College, Templeogue Dublin[6]) advertise as follows:

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[5] One particular incident from the author's time on the TYST might illustrate how inhibiting timetables can be. A teacher explained how certain TY day excursions which had been very popular the previous year had to be dropped because it was decided (school policy) that the co-ordinator 'was not to miss a single LC Honours Maths class', which were timetabled for every day of the week.

[6] From www.ashfield.college.com accessed on 14th January 2007.

> There are many reasons why students decide to move to Ashfield College for 5th year. Most importantly you will find smaller class size. Many are anxious to avoid Transition Year altogether. Coming to Ashfield will ensure the momentum of studying is not broken.

The final sentence leaves little doubt about why people might be 'anxious' to avoid TY or how the authorities in this grind school see the purpose of schooling.

Resistance by supporting the *status quo*

Eisner's list offers other insights into why covert, subtle and inadvertent resistance to TY might operate in a school. His point that 'the norms of schooling are well established and persistent' (Eisner, 1992, p.610) is relevant for any innovation. As seen throughout the early part of Chapter 2, schools are robust institutions. A school's institutional nature means that those working there tend to gravitate towards preserving the *status quo*, the established way of doing things. The realisation in Beech School that the established LC was of limited benefit to the students there was perhaps an exceptional, defining moment, and doesn't happen very often. Furthermore, as will be developed later, schools' selection policies often mean that those poorly served by established programmes may not be in the school in the first place, so the need for change is under appreciated. Other factors may also be at play in resistance to fully embracing TY. Michael Garvey, SLSS, has alluded to that fact when he describes TY as 'hard work'. Rewards for engagement in TY are more likely to be of the psychic variety rather than monetary.

Transition Units – a policy dilemma?

TY related discourse sometimes acknowledges, implicitly, a sense of policy shortcomings. The phrase 'TY needs more structure' is a recurrent one. Presumably this perspective played its part in prompting the NCCA's proposals for the future development of TY. As the data on teachers' reactions to TUs in Chapter 5 indicate, this is a contested area, with some implying that TUs will reduce the creativity associated with TY and the dimension of 'bottom-up' curriculum development. Anne Looney indicated awareness within the NCCA of this danger. When presented

with the possibility that TUs might become regarded as items on a supermarket shelf, she said:

> Nobody treats the curriculum as an educational supermarket, can we point out. Even when we have all the packs, the modules, the folders - people have never had that culture. They have always said about Transition Year that we need resources and materials, even though there are hundreds of packs and modules, so I'd say that is unlikely. The only danger, because of them having an NCCA logo on them, and being connected with assessment and, then, if they are included for matriculation purposes, there might be a challenge there. But I would say it would be something that we would actively try and work against

Thus, already in the emerging discourse on Transition Units, the enthusiasm of some to embrace the innovation sits closely with resistance.

Transition Year: ring-fenced or isolated?

The preference to 'ring-fence' TY needs some analysis. The metaphor of TY as operating in a parallel universe illustrates this real policy dilemma. During the mainstreaming stage, advocates of the programme, employing the gardening metaphor, referred to TY as 'a delicate plant'. It was as if TY had to be nurtured first in a warm glasshouse before taking its place in the more robust environment of the educational garden. As it accommodates itself in the educational garden, in the search for light, heat and water for nurturance and in the general battle for survival, it twists and distorts. The inclination has been to protect TY, to 'ring-fence' it. Minister Mary Hanafin used this ring-fencing image in her written response to the NCCA proposals (*Irish Times,* 1 July 2005). This prompts the question: is ring-fencing in order to protect TY from being colonised by the eLC? Or is it to confine it to its isolated parallel universe? Or might it also be in order to maintain the eLC *status quo*? How can 'the aims and philosophy of TY permeate the entire school' if it is so ring-fenced? This is a key policy dilemma. Much educational discourse, including some of the interviews with personnel in agencies central to policy making and implementation, often reaches a point where, with a fatalistic sigh, one party says 'it's the exams', as an explanation for a lack of innovation. Undoubtedly the dead hand of written terminal examinations and the associated points system for

admission to third-level education is a major restrictor of development in schools. The defeatist sign can also signal an end to discussion, inhibiting exploration of other structural factors that restrict development and, therefore, possible ways of unblocking the apparent 'log-jam' situation that the examination system seems to effect.

The assertion in that the present structures and cultures of schools combined with the ambiguous official policy attitudes surrounding TY conspire, perhaps inadvertently, to favour the *status quo,* and to ensure a type of institutional inertia that resists innovation.

## Is Transition Year 'under-theorised'?

The accumulating evidence from this study seems to point in two opposing directions. Indeed, the opposing thrusts contribute significantly to the ambiguous attitudes to TY that have been associated with the programme since its inception. On the one hand, the data show that many students, their parents and their teachers in the case study schools are convinced that TY contributes to a growth in student maturity. Learning activities beyond the conventional classroom appear to play a big part in this change, not least because of a qualitative shift in the student-teacher relationship. The absence of formal public examinations is also perceived as a factor. Where schools succeed in providing learning activities that students encounter as 'relevant, imaginative and challenging' (Hargreaves *et al,* 1996), young peoples' motivation for learning appears enhanced. There is also evidence that TY classrooms are more democratic than those in the Junior Cycle. The opportunities in TY for more meaningful links between schools and local communities also seem appreciated. Furthermore, many teachers indicate positive attitudes to TY, especially regarding the perceived outcome of students' personal and social development.

And yet, on the other hand, the evidence also points towards fragmentation and a lack of coherence. As discussed earlier, TY's status as a 'ring-fenced', stand-alone

year is problematic in that its relationship with what precedes or follows it is understated and unclear. Partly because of this, schools domesticate the programme according to their own particular circumstances. Given the dominance of eLC outcomes in the perceived goals of Irish schooling, TY is in constant danger of being colonized by eLC values, of, in effect, becoming part of a three-year eLC. In practice, the case study schools tend to implement TY primarily in terms of the outer layer of the TY Onion (TYCSS, 1998; Jeffers, 2007a, p.268). At that level, as some of the policy makers indicate, the programme works extremely well but in so doing highlights difficulties with the other layers, particularly the core or continuity subjects as identified in the very first evaluation of TY (Egan and O'Reilly, 1979).

The thrust of these two different directions creates very significant challenges for schools. The imagination, planning and additional work by school leaders and teachers required to effectively implement TY specific activities should not be underestimated. As the Chief Inspector Eamon Stack indicates in Chapter 5, when he compares devising TY annually to cooking meals, sustaining high levels of imaginative programmes is especially challenging. So is developing a sense of coherence within the school community about TY's place in the scheme of things. Thus, a three-layered set of challenges faces schools, particularly school principals and co-ordinators. They are set out in diagram 7. 6.

TABLE 7.6 THREE-LAYERED INTER-RELATED CHALLENGES FACING SCHOOL OFFERING TY

3. Schooling context	TY always operates in the context of one year in a six year cycle. Therefore its relationship with the rest of the schooling process is critical. Because TY appears different in thrust and structure to the established JC and eLC programmes, the tendency is to view them as separate and distinct. However, a developmental view of adolescence and an educational perspective that respects adolescent development will insist on the need for continuous opportunities for maturing and for education for citizenship throughout the six years of schooling, not solely during the fourth year of a six year cycle.
2. In-school rationale	This level refers to how the various stakeholders, particularly the teachers, within the school community view the rationale for the TY programme, and its components. Decisions about the structure of the curriculum (including content, methodologies and assessment) and the teacher education implications all follow from this.
1. Practical challenges	At this level, the practical, technical or managerial features of TY are very real and immediate for schools. Questions such as what subjects and modules to include on a TY timetable, how long should class periods be, how and when to organise visiting speakers and trips beyond the classroom, the timing and duration of work experience placements or the duties of the co-ordinator are 'nuts and bolts' ones that command urgency. Of course, how one answers these questions depends on the other two dimensions.
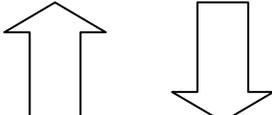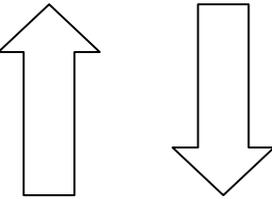
Effective juggling of the 'pile of purposes' (Handy and Aitken, 1990, p.35) that schools are expected to perform demands not only high levels of managerial qualities; it requires a solid theoretical foundation. As tables 7.2, 7.3 and 7.4 demonstrate, attitudes to TY reflect underlying assumptions and beliefs about schooling itself. Therefore, to sustain TY's development, this researcher suggests that the rationale for TY, both within the system and within an individual school needs revisiting. The theoretical underpinning of TY needs strengthening. Comments from policy makers and policy shapers including Eamon Stack, Moira Leyden, Sinéad Breathnach and Marion Lyon indicate an appreciation of the urgency of this at the level of individual schools. Remarks from Anne Looney and John MacGabhann, in particular, point to the even more challenging need to address the rationale question at a whole system level.

As TY has become more accepted – and more domesticated – there is a tendency for

technical rather than theoretical considerations to dominate. The 'how' questions of organising TY programmes and modules often obscures the 'why' questions. This bias was evident, for example, in the interview with Michael Garvey, SLSS. It has been this researcher's experience in conversations with former colleagues on TYST and TYCSS, that an acknowledgement of having been involved in mould-breaking work in assisting schools establish their TY programmes is frequently tempered by regrets at how little we wrote at the time about our work. Those team members tended to be enthusiastic advocates for TY, working very hard at helping teachers - co-ordinators in particular - to operationalise the innovation. While there were strong beliefs among team members about the rationale for TY, extending, developing or critiquing this was not regarded as a high priority for the team. In retrospect, this was highly problematic because neither the DES nor the NCCA appear to have been particularly exercised by a concern for TY's rationale and context. Some academics and students at 3rd level have addressed TY issues but to a limited extent[7].

Re-visiting the TY *Guidelines* (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c) and the *Resource Material* (Doyle *et al*, 1994), it is clear that references to rationale are brief. For example, as already mentioned, the implication is that terms in the mission statement are obvious and uncontested. Similarly, on the same page the key sentence 'The aims and philosophy of Transition Year should permeate the entire school' (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c, p.4) stands alone, an unexplored and unexploded time-bomb. There are no pointers in the guidelines to wider theoretical or academic contexts. The 'wide range of teaching/learning methodologies' (*ibid, p.8*) are presented in bullet point format. Understandably, teachers whose professional identities were closely allied to didactic teaching looked somewhat askance at this series of unexplained bullet points. Similarly, convincing teachers to

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[7] As evident in Chapter 1 and in the bibliography, the number of published works and unpublished theses specifically dealing with TY is very small when compared to what has been written in the same period about more 'mainstream' schooling. If, as Eamon Stack mentioned in his interview, TY accounts for one sixth of the time spent by many students in school, one might reasonably expect much more analysis. There seems to be slightly more published material regarding the LCA, another important innovation, also arguably marginalised in educational discourse, than TY. Perhaps the media coverage of TY – some of which might be classified as of the 'cheer-leading' variety – has obscured the lack of analysis and critique.

shift their approach to assessment so that it becomes more diagnostic, formative and appropriate and involves pupil participation (*ibid*, p.9) requires a more extensive rationale. Perhaps, the belief – which is not without merit – was that teachers would come to appreciate more the theoretical basis for their work when they had engaged in the practice and seen the evidence, as it were. Indeed, the evidence from the parents in this study suggests such a journey in many cases.

The *Resource Material* (Doyle *et al,* 1994, p.4) outlines a rationale for curriculum change. This includes a ten point rationale for TY. These bullet points were engaged with in some detail at early in-service workshops but orally rather than in writing. Again, there are no pointers for the reader to further explore aspects of the rationale, no references to the themes discussed in chapter 2. It is this researcher's opinion that the absence of a rationale that links TY to student motivation is not unconnected with the relatively low uptake of TY among boys, particularly those from working class backgrounds.

One cannot but conclude that TY is 'under-theorised', that the rationale for TY within the schooling system and within each individual school needs to be made much more explicit. Some features need urgent attention and it is possible that current NCCA work on TUs will give renewed impetus to TY. As indicated, TY's place in the six-year context requires explication. Aspects of the rationale that deserve greater attention include:

- Motivating mid-adolescents for learning, especially those with limited experience of academic success
- The relationship between the cognitive and the emotional in learning
- Varied methodologies particularly experiential learning
- Learning to learn
- The need for diagnostic and formative assessment.
- TY's potential for community building, inside and outside the school.

TY as an agent of change

A central concern for Gleeson (2004), over the past decade, has been that, despite the rhetoric of innovation and even complaints of 'innovation fatigue', 'little has changed in the culture of our schools or in classroom practice' (*ibid.* p.105). He contends that part of the explanation for this paradox lies in the uncritical adoption of 'loose curriculum discourse'. He cites the interchangeability of terms like *reform*, *innovation, development* and *change.* He questions the extent to which any deep change has resulted, at the objective level. Specifically, he suggests exploring the question at the three levels used by Fullan (1991, p.32 sqq): materials, practice and practitioners' beliefs/values.

Viewing TY through this lens reveals a mixed, and at times, conflicting, picture. The extent to which TY thinking and practice is what Mary McGynn described as 'outside the box' can be seen as engaging with very different learning materials than the ubiquitous textbook. Indeed, educational publishers frequently bemoan how difficult it is to 'crack the TY market[8]', suggesting that reliance of textbooks in TY is much less than in other years. As previously indicated, the development of numerous 'educational packs' by agencies outside the formal educational sphere, specifically for TY, represents another change in materials. Of course, the use of alternative materials in TY does not necessarily translate into the other five years, reinforcing the image of TY as 'a parallel universe'.

The evidence is that there is some change in teachers' practice in TY, notably in students' comments about improved relationships, about teachers being liberated from examination pressures and perceptions of democratic classrooms. The data suggest that an impetus is created that carries through into 5th and 6th year and that TY is already contributing to the kind of changed senior cycle school culture that the

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[8] Educational publishing is a lucrative industry in Ireland. Aggressive marketing techniques ensure that teachers rarely have to purchase textbooks, tapping into an almost unlimited supply of 'sample copies'. According to one salesperson working for one of the biggest companies 'We live or die by getting onto the school annual booklists. My heart sinks when I see these lists for Transition Year. There's so little on them'.

NCCA (2003) imagines for the future. A key question – beyond the current study – is whether there is any consequential change in teachers' practice at JC level, and if not, why not?

Beliefs and values are always difficult to identify precisely. In Ireland, where gaps between rhetoric and reality are commonplace, a point that Glesson (*ibid.* p.103) observes Eamon de Valera understood, finding out what people actually believe – as distinct form what they say – is especially difficult. The evidence here points to some differences between TY co-ordinators and TY teachers in general. In each of the schools studied it was quite clear that co-ordinating TY is a professionally demanding and, often, professionally significant experience. This is also supported by the TYCSS (2000) survey. In general, it seems that it is difficult to practice as a TY co-ordinator without having one's basic assumptions about schooling challenged. In particular, teachers' beliefs about young people's potential, the power of experiential learning, and the value of closer links between schools and communities appear strengthened through TY.

Gleeson (2004, p.121) also cites Hord's (1995) analysis of cycles of reform in the US. She identifies four stages: 'fix the parts' where change is incremental and superficial; 'fix the schools' where there is attention to local context; 'fix the teachers', with a focus on teacher education, and, finally, 'fix the system', involving radical change. As illustrated by this study, TY fits relatively easily into the first two categories. Firstly, it is a distinct entity (stand-alone, ring-fenced). Secondly, there is flexibility for local adaptation of the guidelines (domestication etc). There is some evidence, as mentioned above in relation to TY co-ordinators, that the experience – and to some extent the associated in-career development activities – has resulted in teacher change. Finally, while TY may act as a mirror to the system, even to the point of highlighting blemishes, the covert, inadvertent nature of resistance and the keeping of TY in a 'parallel universe' seem to ensure that its overall impact on the system remains limited.

Learning from the Transition Year experience

As indicated in Chapter 2, insights from Dewey, Friere, Rogers and Kolb are especially relevant to TY. For example, recalling Rogers' scale ranging from 'nonsense learning' to 'experiential learning' one might say that the extremes of his spectrum are exaggerations. However, his model does resonate with how students contrast their JC experience with that of TY. TY can be seen as a conscious effort to move away from an emphasis on memorisation, rote learning and learning for extrinsic rewards. Work experience probably represents the most dramatic form of Rogers' 'significant learning' in TY, though some of the extra-classroom learning activities and engagement with some 'big' projects are also at that end of the spectrum. Dewey's admonition to focus on the pedagogic rather than the subject-matter – 'to psychologise it' and Kolb's contention that 'we are all… atomic physicists' further supports the thrust of the TY guidelines.

Designing TY programmes where learning reaches into young people's lifeworld and connects with and helps them make sense of their lived experience is a major challenge. Even more daunting for policy makers is to ensure that the other post-primary programmes learn from the experience of TY. That is more likely to happen, if the theories underpinning TY are made more explicit.

Relationships

From the point of view of policy and practice, one of the findings already mentioned from the school data is worth re-visiting. Students, teachers and parents attest to greatly improved relationships between students and their teachers during TY. The interviewees in Chapter 5 also seem to accept this as an effect of TY. The meanings people attach to this development deserve further analysis, not least because of their relevance to the concept of 'school as community.'

Students tend to explain the change in terms of teachers being freed from examinations. Parents and teachers sometimes ascribe the phenomenon to natural

maturity. A few make explicit reference to the impact of TY learning experiences. Few extend the discussion or analysis to pose questions about relationships during the first three years of post-primary schooling.

This is a good example of TY acting as a mirror to the rest of the schooling system. The message is not just that student-teacher relationships improve in TY. It is that, in many cases, during Junior Cycle, particularly in the examination-orientated third year, relationships between students and their teachers appears quite poor. While the primary focus of this study is on TY, the JC as problematic bubbles away below the surface of much of the school data. This appears to support observations by Smyth et al. about students in second-year. They write that students:

> '… who feel that they have been constantly 'given out to' or treated unfairly by their teachers are more disengaged from school life and less likely to approach school personnel when they have difficulties. Therefore the types of interactions students have with their teachers may have as much, if not more, influence than the formal support structures that schools put in place for their students (Smyth *et al* 2006, p.190).

A decade ago, Trant made some incisive observations regarding relationships that have retained their currency. He said:

We live in an Ireland that is becoming more and more secularised and we can no longer assume that young people have a coherent set of values instilled in them by family and church. The young people themselves appear increasingly disenchanted with what they perceive to be the school's failure to engage with their deeply felt personal concerns. In this context, individual curriculum programmes about values are not the complete answer. The answer will have to be one that encompasses the entire curriculum and has a holistic approach. Relationships and values have to be 'caught' as well as taught. They have to be inculcated by example as well as precept and at the end of the day they have to be lived and experienced before they can be understood. I believe that many of the things our society needs today like solidarity, citizenship, care for the environment, respect for human rights and the fundamental principles of relating to each other as human beings, can only be effectively learned by participating in some form of genuine community life, through which basic human values are inculcated. This is the challenge which now confronts the school – how to become a learning community (Trant, 1998, p.43).

This emphasis on the primacy of relationships resonates with many of the ideas explored in Chapter 2, notably Noddings on caring; Sergiovanni on community; and Hargreaves on the role of emotions in teaching. It also highlights Irish young peoples' perceptions of being treated unfairly by adults, echoing Tuohy's and Cairns' (2000) work and Devlin's finding that '… young people see their institutional relationships with adults as for the most part unequal, troubled and rooted in stereotypical ideas about their attributes and ideas' (Devlin, 2006, p.38).

If one views schools as key sites where young people grow up, then their relationships with each other and with their teachers is crucially important. This does not simply impact on young people. Day *et al.* (2007, p.61) found that maintaining positive relationships with students was a key motivating factor in people becoming teachers and remaining in the profession. In his study of emotions and secondary teachers, Hargreaves, (2000) suggests that 'secondary schools classrooms are not places where teachers develop shared emotional bonds with students or have close emotional bonds and connections with them.' With strong echoes of the evidence in this study, where students value extra-classroom learning activities, Hargreaves found:

The best chances of breakthrough, insight and positive relationship are achieved outside the classroom, where teachers have the chance of seeing their students and being seen by them in a new light (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 822).

He also noted that when teachers were asked how the school promoted positive emotions like exhilaration and enjoyment, 'everything they mentioned took place outside the core processes of teaching and learning in classrooms' (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 821).

 This dichotomy between student-teacher interaction inside and outside classrooms deserves further attention. In TY it seems that learning experiences beyond the classroom such as field trips, walks, visits to other schools or to 3rd level colleges, trips abroad – or outside the frame of the traditional classroom such as the minicompany experience – generate more positive emotional encounters between students and their teachers. When teachers can build on this within classrooms, the result is participative classes, where students' voices are more likely to be heard,. Students, it will be recalled, also attribute such classrooms to the absence of formal examination pressures and, in some cases, see teachers as liberated by this absence.

Elsewhere, Hargreaves, in highlighting the importance of emotions in teaching, as discussed in Chapter 2, says:

Without relationships of emotional understanding, teachers… are prone to experience emotional misunderstanding where they mistake their feelings for the feelings of others. Where close relationships do not exist in schools and teachers do not know students well, teachers can easily misconstrue students' exuberance for hostility or parent respect for agreement, for example… Emotional misunderstanding strikes at the foundations of teaching and learning – lowering standards and depressing quality. If we misunderstand how students are responding, we misunderstand how they learn. Successful teaching and learning therefore depend of establishing close bonds with students (and also with colleagues and parents) and on creating conditions of teaching that make emotional understanding possible (Hargreaves, 2001, p.1060).

This perspective, when combined with the data from this study which indicate how

the quality of student-teacher relationships improve, particularly through learning experiences that extend beyond the traditional classroom, has a number of implications. Firstly, it suggests the importance of ensuring the inclusion of extra-classroom activities in TY programmes. This requires both time and, on occasions, money (for buses etc). It also points to the value of student-teacher activities – curricular and extra-curricular - beyond the classroom throughout the six years of schooling. This is especially important, according to Hargreaves, where 'socio-cultural distance' is greatest (Hargreaves, 2001, p.1070).

In this regard, the 2001 ASTI-DES industrial dispute is relevant. The partial withdrawal of ASTI members from extra-curricular activities during and after the dispute, reported in Chapter 6, is likely to impact most on schools with least resources. Fee-charging schools provide teachers with additional remuneration for their participation in extra-curricular activities or employ others for such tasks. Cultures that increase the gap between extra-curricular learning and conventional classrooms further narrows the professional identity of teachers. Bearing in mind Moira Leyden's remarks about teachers' workloads, perhaps greater acknowledgement, encouragement and formal legitimation of teachers' engagement in extra-curricular activities in schools is needed.

This focus on relationships, also suggests the value, not only in TY, but throughout the school, of timetabling learning situations that go beyond the predictable confines of traditional 40-minute classes. Thus, more project type work and more field trips, are two practical examples of the shift towards more active learning that is required in the practice of teaching and learning in Junior Cycle. While, in Chapter 5, the Chief Inspector's enthusiasm for this appears limited, he did flag a need for greater engagement by schools with people from 'the community'. As well as such changes requiring the sort of assessment emphases currently found, for example, in CSPE, Art, Craft and Design and Home Economics, and the LCA, there are also implications for teacher's own education - initial and continuous.

The relationship focus also prompts challenges for how students work in classrooms. The dominant model of individual, isolated, competitive effort (Lyons *et al,* 2003; Smyth, 2005,) sends an impoverished view of learning to students. The data in this study indicate how much students themselves believe that working in groups and teams enhances their learning, motivation and enjoyment. Thus, the emphasis Michael Garvey, SLSS, mentions on promoting co-operative learning suggests a sign of influential flow from the 'new' programmes into the mainstream.

Furthermore, this focus on the centrality of relationships to learning reverberates very much with some of the theorists discussed in Chapter 2. Friere's critique is apposite, especially when he shows how the 'banking' concept of education minimises or annuls students' creative power. He argues that:

> Education must begin with the solution to the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students (Friere, 1970, p 53).

TY offers evidence of the possibilities within Irish schooling of serious engagement with that contradiction and other aspects of the 'hidden curriculum' (Lynch, 1989).

Transition Year and inequality

Rogers' asserts that

> When a system's structure is already very unequal, the consequences of an innovation... will lead to even greater inequality in the form of wider socio-economic gaps (Rogers, 1995, p. 442).

Stoll and Fink (1996, pp 3-7) observe that 'policy efforts towards educational change have largely ignored the increasing diversity and polarisation of society'.

The optional nature of TY, that is, the differential uptake of TY by some – but not all - schools and by some – but not all - students within other schools can be seen as a matter of young people and their parents exercising free choices. However, the distinction between compulsory and optional is not as clear-cut as it might at first

appear (Smyth 2004, p.24; Jeffers, 2007a, p.307). Of particular concern is the possibility, alluded to in this study by Looney, MacGabhann and Lyon, in particular, that TY exacerbates rather than alleviates educational inequality. Could official policy, while masquerading as freedom, actually involve structural inequality?

Baker *et al* (2004) present a forceful case for the centrality of inequality as an issue within education and offer a framework for analysis of inequalities. Equality in education matters because it is a human right; it is indispensable for the exercise of global citizenship; it offers the potential to counter inequalities in other social institutions and systems; and because of its impact on personal development. Schools and colleges play a central role in defining who and what is of cultural value, partly by including and excluding. In a globalised, and increasingly credentialised world, education plays a key role in mediating access to a host of social, political and economic goods in society. The mandatory and universal nature of schooling is such that it is not a preparation for life, but, for young people, life itself. This suggests that, as such, it should be egalitarian in both its processes and outcomes. (Baker *et al*, 2004, p. 141-142).

They identify four major equality problems in education. These are presented in table 7.7.

TABLE 7.7. FOUR MAJOR EQUALITY PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION, *AFTER BAKER ET AL. 2004, P.143.*

PROBLEM	MANIFESTATIONS
1. Equality of resources and economically generated inequalities in education: the primacy of social class	The complicit role of educational institutions in promoting social class inequality through practices of selection and admission, grouping and tracking, and a curriculum biased towards linguistic intelligences. An awareness that inequality in education originates in institutionalised inequalities of access to wealth and income should prompt policy makers and educators to challenge these inequalities.
2. Equality of respect and recognition in education: recognising diversity	Institutionally, schools and colleges engage in practices of denial and depreciation regarding age, sexuality, religious beliefs, disability, language, gender, class, 'race', or ethnicity. Resolution of these issues is much more amenable to action within education itself, notably in policies and pedagogical practices.
3. Equality of power: democratising education	Educational decision-making and the exercise of educational authority reflect inequalities in power and can lead to processes of exclusion, marginalisation, trivialisation and misrepresentation.

	Also evident in curricula, pedagogy and assessment. At the level of student-teacher relationships, resolution involves substituting dialogue for dominance, co-operation and collegiality for hierarchy, and active learning and problem solving for passivity.
4. Equality of love, care and solidarity: the emotional dimensions of education	An over-emphasis in schooling on intellectual development and a failure to recognise students and teachers as emotional beings. Resolution by ensuring educational experiences that enable students to develop emotional skills or personal intelligences, per se. Especially relevant in preparing students for care, love and solidarity work.

Analysing TY under these four areas highlights the complexity and ambiguous position of the programme within the system. Working back from number four to one, TY can be read as a major contributor to redressing that rationality-emotions balance within post-primary schooling. A rationale for the importance of personal and social development education has been presented in Chapter 2. Data in Chapter 4 highlights how effective TY can be in advancing young peoples' maturity. A weakness lies in the very fact that TY is seen as particularly dedicated to personal and social development, almost as if the other five years are for intellectual development. Students who don't engage with TY, for whatever reasons, may thus be deprived educationally. Thus, the optional nature of TY is problematic.

As regards the democratisation of education – the third point on the list - TY appears to be making a particular contribution, highlighting the possibilities and benefits for teachers and students of greater dialogue, co-operation and active learning.

More democratic and participative classrooms in TY increase the possibilities of issues of marginalisation being addressed. In this study, data regarding participation on the basis of ethnic origin, disability, sexual orientation or religious beliefs – the second category on the list - was not sought or did not become available. There is data to indicate a greater uptake by girls than boys – in the region of 55:45 in recent years.

TY's major difficulty on the Baker *et al* criteria centres on the first category, that of social class. Participation rates in TY (Jeffers, 2002; Smyth, 2004) indicate persistent patterns of lower participation by young people from working class and socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. TY is also less well established in VEC schools, which cater disproportionately for these young people. This is a serious policy issue, particularly as 'Equality' is one of the five underpinning principles of the White Paper (Government of Ireland, 1995) and the fundamental thrust of the *Education Act* (Government of Ireland, 1998) is 'to make provision in the interests of the common good for the education of every person in the State'. Remarks by Marion Lyon, John MacGabhann and Anne Looney, in particular, in Chapter 5, which suggest that TY exacerbates existing educational inequalities, underline the seriousness of the problem.

Brantlinger (2003) notes how stratified school structures are remarkably resilient in resisting reform efforts. She is critical of research that looks at innovations that 'failed' without questioning whether 'people who have the most control really want schools to be fair and equal' (*ibid,* p.189). Her assertion, supported by studies from the US, is that both 'social inequities and school hierarchies result from the personal intention and design of the dominant class' (*ibid*, p.189). Brantlinger's argument is that middle-class parents believe that schools are meritocracies and that their children achieve because they are smart, have caring parents, live in stimulating home environments, work hard and hold high aspirations. However, she says:

> For meritocracies to be fair… there must be a comparable distribution of resources and some homogeneity in student status: school conditions must be equal, students should have access to quality learning, and the curriculum must be pertinent and culturally relevant for all (*ibid.* p.191).

This is clearly not the case in the Irish system where some post-primary schools charge fees; others request sizeable 'voluntary contributions'; while those in more disadvantaged areas cannot easily access such advantages. Furthermore, data on transfer to 3rd level education show persistent under- representation by people in more socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

As the account from Beech School in this case study shows, it is possible for a DEIS school to harness TY and develop a programme to which disadvantaged young people respond well. It is also clear from Beech School that the school leaders and teachers engage in significant encouragement of students to choose TY and that sustaining an attractive programme is demanding and draining of teachers' energies.

Burke's original vision was an egalitarian one. Indeed back in the 1970s he saw TY as potentially assisting young people who might enter the workforce without completing an eLC. This was prior to the introduction of the Vocational Preparation and Training Programme (VPTP). As the programme developed, TY became, in the mid-1980s, the TYO. The 'option' word, still used by some people, emphasises choice. This consumerist language appears to be based on the policy principle that some young people benefit from six years of post primary schooling while others get five. Saying that 'poor people choose not to do TY' is, according to Brantlinger, an example of 'how the middle class negotiates and rationalises school advantage', the sub-title of her book *Dividing Classes.* The root of the problem, as Anne Looney asserted strongly in her interview, has to do with admission policies and the fact that there is a policy vacuum as to 'whether we are having inclusive education or are having segregated education'. As Smyth *et al*. (2004, p.24) point out the optional/compulsory discussion is not as clear cut as first appears precisely because of the significant different patterns of enrolment of schools. Tuohy, writing about Catholic Schools, notes how admission policies can be nuanced. He cites the example of a school that proclaims a policy of taking all students but, in practice, is not *accepting* all pupils. They may not welcome them all in the same way. He continues:

> Policies of inclusion are not just related to admission but also involve the way students are organised in streamed classes within the school. .. Such policies can radically affect the quality of a child's experience of the school (Tuohy, 2006, p. 37).

Indeed, the compulsory/optional issue regarding TY is an example of how existing inequalities (regarding enrolment) become exaggerated in TY.

A further complicating factor is the unfortunate juxtaposition in some schools of TY and LCA so that students have to choose one or the other but rarely both. The LCA is an innovation with 'a radically different curriculum structure' (Gleeson and Glanville, 1996, p.119). In the context of this discussion, uptake of LCA has been much greater in schools designated 'disadvantaged' than in schools which charge fees, indicating a strong class bias. Indeed, many of the schools that don't offer TY do offer LCA, further confirming structural difficulties in the uptake of senior cycle programmes[9]. From Brantlinger's analysis, one would have to ask why there is not more discussion about these visible patterns along social class lines. Anecdotal evidence from some schools suggests alignments of LCA and JSCP groups in ways that appear very like streaming and the labelling of some young people in first year as 'not LC material'.

There are also some disturbing comments - made occasionally in this study – that some children 'wouldn't be able' for TY. The Chief Inspector's comments in Chapter 5 on this issue are clear and unequivocal, suggesting awareness within the highest levels of the DES of the sensitivity of the equality issue.

The fact that the practice of five years of post-primary schooling for some and six years for others has become ingrained, accepted and, mainly, uncontested tends to confirm Brantlinger's questioning as to how strongly people really want to change an unequal system. It also prompts a question about 'consensus' in Irish education. As Gleeson observes:

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[9] In the absence of precise figures, this assertion is based on a number of conversations with DES officials who spoke to me about 'smaller schools' having to decide between LCA and TY.

The essentially political role of schooling in the distribution of wealth and privilege, in the transmission of culture and the development of citizenship remains largely unacknowledged. Insofar as education is about preparation for democratic and egalitarian citizenship, the prevailing model of partnership has to be reviewed (Gleeson, 2004, p.130).

The professional development of teachers for Transition Year

The Minister for Education who introduced TY in 1974 says that teacher development was a key part of his vision for TY. As he put it:

I could foresee, again extrapolating from my own personal experience, that if you put people into the deep end here (with TY) they would really have to sink or swim; but I knew they would swim because I had a high regard for the teaching profession in the sense that I knew that if circumstances could be such they would be delighted to be liberated to do that for which their basically idealistic calling had prepared them. So it (TY) was, in a sense, an emancipation of the teaching profession to educate as distinct from grind (Burke, 2001, personal interview).

There is evidence from the teacher data in this study that, for a number, TY has been that liberation. They have embraced TY enthusiastically. However, as the feedback to the NCCA from the TY Conference in April 2007 indicates in Chapter 6, teachers also experience TY as a heavy demand on their time and energy. Furthermore, because of the isolated nature of teaching, it is difficult to gauge the extent to which those who don't swim, sink. For teachers, drowning is often a quiet, even silent, death.

TY etches, in sharp relief, important questions about teacher identity. As Burke asserts, the teacher is much more than a grinder of examination results. The implications that follow from the TY *Guidelines* (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c) are of the teacher as an extended professional. This manifests itself in a number of distinct ways and has important policy implications.

Firstly, the vision is of the teacher who plays an active role, with colleagues, in the design of a curriculum that is sensitive to the particular school context.

Secondly, the understanding is of someone who can apply a repertoire of teaching and learning methodologies, again suited to the interests and aptitudes of students.

Thirdly, the guidelines suggest a broad rather than a narrow view of subject competencies - in particular the ability of the teacher to link specific subjects/modules to wider goals of personal development and maturity; social competence and social awareness; education for citizenship; learning to learn and making connections between the world beyond the classroom and what happens within classrooms. Also, the presumption is that teachers will work in a cross-curricular or interdisciplinary manner.

Fourthly, as someone familiar with adolescent learning, the teacher not only knows that assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process, but engages in diagnostic and formative as well as summative modes of assessment, using a variety of strategies, including engaging the student in the process.

Fifthly, the guidelines, in stressing the importance of internal evaluation of TY in schools, imply a vision of the teacher as a reflective practitioner.
This view is represented diagrammatically in figure 7. 8.

Curriculum design
with colleagues and individually

Evaluation of one's own work
with colleagues and individually

Application of various forms of assessment *including diagnostic, formative and summative*

Engagement with students in learning activities *using a variety of teaching and learning methodologies*
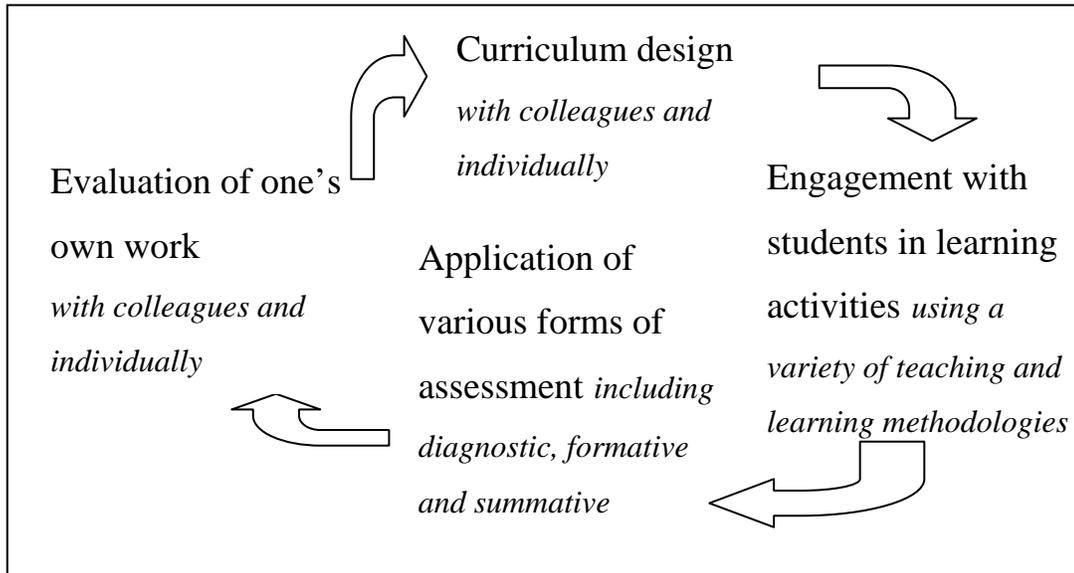
These are challenging waters in which teachers of TY are invited to swim. Eamon Stack, DES, noted in his interview that, rather than focus on challenges, he prefers to see TY in terms of 'opportunities' for teachers. One particular observation from the Chief Inspector seems especially pertinent. He says:

> There are huge lessons to be learned in terms of teaching overall from Transition Year. Of course, they impact on not just continuous professional development but initial teacher training as well.

What's not clear is how current policy trends seek to apply these 'huge lessons'. As the interviews with the Chief Inspector and with Michael Garvey, SLSS, indicate there has been a policy shift from programme-specific in-service education to a more generic variety. Granville (2005, p.22), who evaluated the impact and experience of the SLSS, reports that this 'concern to develop generic approaches to CPD was, in part, a response to criticism from schools of unnecessary duplication in the provision of support'. The case of work experience for LCVP, TY and LCA is cited. In that report themes of fragmentation and lack of coherence resonate with the findings here.

Granville found strong needs for curriculum programme support voiced by those associated with LCA. The reader is left to speculate as to how significant the apparent non-articulation of a similar need regarding TY is. Has TY slipped down schools' – and the SLSS's – agenda to a point where it is regarded as self-sufficient? Or have schools domesticated TY to a point where they don't perceive a need for ongoing curriculum development? Or, as Granville suggests (*ibid,* p.47), is it part of a wider phenomenon where teachers increasingly see themselves as restricted professionals, primarily engaged in 'delivery'?

Granville's report clarifies some of the key issues facing the evolution of CPD. His discussion of the 'level of use' model regarding curriculum innovation, after Hall, and Huberman's career cycle (*ibid*, pp. 49-51) contributes to conceptual clarity. It is clear from the interview with Eamon Stack, DES, that the Chief Inspector accepts that teachers' CPD needs are complex and varied and not necessarily linked to age or experience. The work of Day *et al.* (2006). cited in Chapter 2, further highlights the need for a nuanced ,differentiaed approach. Granville's exploration of perceptions of CPD as remediation, development, improvement or system change also point towards greater conceptual clarity regarding 'professional' development among teachers in Ireland.

Granville contends (2005*,* p.61) that, at a time of significant change in a complex system, where change is seen as 'emergent', the evolution of such a system cannot be predicted. This sense of a heuristic approach to CPD, allied to the inter-agency tensions evident in Chapter 5, perhaps underplays the micro-politics of educational development. TY's 'ring-fenced' status – living in a parallel universe – combined with a relative shortage of advocates, as already mentioned, seems to render the programme somewhat of a poor relation at the CPD negotiating table.

One of Granville's concluding comments (*ibid,* p.51) that the most positive responses to the work of the SLSS had come from teachers 'who have been professionally engaged with particular initiatives in their schools' returns the

discussion to the relationship between generic and programme-specific CPD. As indicated earlier in this chapter – and suggested by many of those interviewed in the previous one – schools need to clarify their rationale for engaging with TY. Such engagement, at local school level, should lead to extensive school-based collaborative work by teachers developing the TY curriculum, advancing the view that sees teachers as the subjects rather than the objects of curriculum innovation.

This suggestion, with a major focus of CPD being on the individual school, makes particular demands on the TY co-ordinator's capacity to exercise curriculum leadership among peers. Perhaps, even more challenging is the concept of teacher agency. The interviews with Moira Leyden, ASTI, and John MacGabhann, TUI, convey a sense of teachers overburdened by a regime that is, relatively speaking, unsupported by school leadership, by the DES or by the system in general. Very little sense of teachers as active agents, or as extended professionals, emerges. At times it is as if the concept of 'teacher as victim' is greater than that of 'teacher as agent[10]'.

In her study of Learning Support Teachers, Day (2005, p. 24) found that they draw on the discourse of 'difference' to present themselves, on the one hand as isolated, marginalised and excluded while, on the other hand, as special and proud of it, with the attendant elevated status often conferred on specialists.

 Lack of a sense of agency is not a uniquely Irish problem. Fullan's view from North America more than a decade ago was:

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[10] While not explicitly mentioned in each interview with the trade union representatives, both ASTI and TUI have engaged in recent years in extensive public discussion on 'discipline' in schools. Primarily, their stance has been to regard 'discipline' as a 'conditions of service' issue rather than one to do with curriculum, pedagogy or CPD. In so doing, the impression of 'teacher as victim' is, inevitably, highlighted.

> We don't have a learning profession. Teachers and teacher educators do not know enough about subject matter, they don't know enough about how to teach, and they don't know enough about how to understand and influence the conditions around them (Fullan, 1993, p.109).

Furthermore, Fullan located the root of the problem in teacher education: 'Above all, teacher education – from initial preparation to the end of the career – is not geared towards continuous learning' (*ibid,* p.108). As he sees it, the solution is clear: Making explicit and strengthening moral purpose and change agentry and their connection is the key to altering the profession.

TY offers clear opportunities for teachers to deepen their knowledge of subject matter, develop imaginative approaches to teaching and experience the empowerment and sense of agency that comes from designing, teaching and re-shaping modules and TY subjects - in short, being curriculum developers. Schools require pro-active leadership that facilitates the realisation of such possibilities and, that knows that school-based CPD is critical.

A spotlight on agency invariably brings the individual centre stage. Important as collegiality and collaboration are in schools, teachers thinking for themselves is a *sine qua non* of healthy development. Making sense of the changes taking place in society, in young people, in educational policy developments and in the culture and climate of the school is an on-going professional task. With varying degrees of success, teachers integrate each new development into their overall view of their professional identity. There is an important individual pursuit. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) in dealing with the elusive question of happiness, focuses on the importance of learning to control inner experiences as well as seeking to change the external conditions of life. Senge (1990, p.139) notes that organisational learning cannot happen if individuals are not learning. Fullan asserts that:

> A sound personal learning stance is the key both to optimal individual survival and to system change (Fullan, 1993, p.141).

Leadership and schools as learning communities

TY, with the myriad opportunities for the kind of formal and informal on-going professional talk referred to above, invites teachers to step towards the kind of learning community Senge imagines. Individual learning is likely to move to a collaborative plane when a teacher experiences, in practice, the coming together of two or more people with complementary skills to create a new understanding that neither had beforehand and probably would not have reached on his or her own. This first step on the road to schools as learning communities is sometimes followed by the individual realising that s/he is engaged in an ongoing process of formal and informal adult education. This leads to a view of the school as a model of participatory democracy. As Mezirow remarks:

> … The nature of adult learning itself mandates participatory democracy as both the means and social goal. Following Habermas, this view identifies critical reflection, rational discourse, and praxis as central to significant adult learning and the *sine qua non* of emancipatory democracy (Mezirow, 1996, p. 66).

Callan, reflecting on his analysis of extending curriculum projects concludes:

> Teaching and learning practices that promote experiential learning, foster independent thinking, encourage reflection, sharpen observations, enrich conversation and dialogue, and embrace respect for differences, are fostered in a school culture of a community of learners. Democratic as distinct from hierarchical relationships pervade such a school setting; shared decision-making based on learned experiences would also be a feature of such settings. To realise such settings throughout our schooling system new forms of relationships need to emerge at all levels of the system. Old hierarchical forms of relationship and traditional power bases have to give way to new forms of professional collaboration between national agencies and local agencies, between personnel at local level and personnel within school settings. Specifically, a keener understanding of the local school setting where national policies are being implemented is required (Callan, 2006, p. 226).

Recalling the account of school cultures in Chapter 2, the principal as 'the gatekeeper of change' has to play a pivotal role if the kind of cultural change that Callan suggests is to become reality. There is evidence from this study that TY – not least because of its flexibility, uncertainty and invitation to participation – is a particularly appropriate vehicle through which cultural change can be facilitated in school. Evidence from the joint LDS, DES, OECD (2007) country background report on *Improving School Leadership* highlights the move towards what it calls 'learning-centred leadership', though it recognises that the weight of tradition and expectation goes against this vision of leadership.

The significance of TY

Participants in this study generally perceive TY as different in tenor and thrust from other post-primary programmes, particularly the JC and eLC. The flexibility within schools to put their own authentic stamp on the programme ensures that TY manifests itself in distinctly different ways in different school contexts. One of the many paradoxes associated with TY concerns the extent to which difference is seen as desirable. This raises issues of continuity, congruence and complementarity within the system.

Informants identify a number of distinct contributions, which the TY programme adds to the schooling system. There is strong support among students, their parents and teachers, as well as among policy makers and shapers that TY is often very effective in promoting young peoples' maturity. The progamme's particular focus on young peoples' developmental needs is seen as complementing the other five years. TY's holistic emphasis is seen as an important counterbalance by some who believe - like the originator of TY who wanted young people to step off the academic treadmill and devote time to personal development and community service - that examination pressures bring unfortunate consequences.

TY's 'stand-alone' status and its optional nature ensures that its relationships with what precedes it or follows can be problematic. A lack of policy clarity on this matter presents particular challenges for school communities designing and refining TY programmes. Indeed, TY's capacity to advance personal and social development and to realise some of its very ambitious aims presents another paradox. The fact that a significant proportion of mid-adolescents do not follow TY and move directly to an eLC programme immediately after the JC examination prompts many questions. How well catered for is their personal and social development? What tensions arise in fifth and sixth year classes that include students, some of whom have completed TY and others who have not? Does TY's optional nature reinforce existing inequalities in a system where equality is one of the five underpinning principles?

A number of the students remarked on how liberating TY can be for teachers. The evidence points to TY facilitating improved relationships between students and their teachers. The relative professional freedom offered by TY, while challenging, presents opportunities for teachers' professional growth and development. In this sense, TY can be viewed as a form of pedagogic laboratory where teachers and students have the flexibility to explore more imaginative ways of teaching and learning. Activities that involve learning beyond the conventional 40 minute class – including work experience, mini-company, educational field trips and involvement in project work - as well as experiential learning, generally, give TY a pedagogic richness that can enhance student learning and teacher competence.

Some of the particular learning experiences in TY can be especially engaging and motivating for young people whose prior experience of schooling has been less than positive. The data show how this can be most dramatically evident in relation to work experience where a one or two-week placement can, literally, alter the direction of a young person's view of her/himself, her/his schooling and her/his future. The capacity of learning experiences that are 'relevant, imaginative and challenging' (Hargreaves *et al,* 1996) to engage young people, at a critical time in

their growth, is well illustrated by a well-organised TY. That latter point is important. Because schools are complex institutions, as explained as Chapter 2, order –the opposite of chaos - is necessary. But order does not have to mean dull, boring predictability. References to 'flow' (Csikzentmihalyi, 1990) in Chapter 2 illustrate that spontaneity can be seen as the opposite of predictability. TY ensures spontaneity in schooling.[11]

The underlying thrust of TY's philosophy is to enable participation in a democratic society (Ireland, Department of Education, 1993c, p. 4). For many young people, more democratic classrooms and greater involvement in their local community are among the defining features of TY. TY classrooms, as spaces where young voices get a hearing not experienced in the Junior Cycle, is a distinctive finding from this research, resonating with the findings of Lynch and Lodge (1999), Hargreaves (1999) and Smyth *et al*, (2005, 2006). The main explanations offered for this change in TY are associated with activities that involve learning beyond the conventional classroom[12] as well as teachers being freed from the constraints of public examinations.

Some, though not all, policy shapers and policy makers indicate an awareness of this thrust towards greater participation and, in some cases, enthusiasm for it. As indicated in Chapter 2, young people in TY are at a critical stage of development. This manifestation of more engaged, democratic classrooms in TY may well be a major contribution to young peoples' social and political development. What seems critically important is to link those 'beyond the classroom' learning activities with more conventional classroom activities where genuine dialogue can occur. Well constructed learning experiences beyond the classroom, such as those proposed in

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[11] A recent account of the importance of spontaneity for healthy human development can be found in Maire Murray's column in the Health supplement to the Irish Times 26th February 2008.

[12] While the phrase 'learning beyond the classroom; has been used extensively, the idea should be taken to encompass those in-school activities such as mini-company, 'big' projects such as Young Social Innovators and more modest other experiential learning activities such as 'Plan Newtown'. Inviting members of local communities, people from NGOs or from particular employments, as mentioned by the Chief Inspector Eamon Stack, can also be grouped under this umbrella term.

Doyle *et al* (1994, p.16) as 'significant learning days' which can take place in each subject area appear noticeably relevant. The importance of TY planning taking place at the timetable level but also at the calendar level with such significant learning days flagged well in advance (rather than as some arbitrary, ad-hoc arrangement, though such events should not be ruled out) is underlined by such activities. For those teachers who are comfortable with a more authoritarian, unidirectional approach to their teaching, learning to facilitate more open, participative classes may present special challenges and deserves serious attention at the level of CPD.

The emerging society and perception of its needs continually generates discussion about learning: what it involves; how it might be promoted; what should be prioritized and related questions. The discourse of 'lifelong learning' emerged initially in the context of the European project (Faure, 1972). Significantly, second-level schooling was marginalized in this discussion as the focus shifted from a comprehensive re-imagining of policy education to matters of more immediate economic concern (OECD, 1973). The implications of the concept of lifelong learning for traditional schooling deserve close examination (Rinne, 1999). Within the discourse of lifelong learning, the notion of 'learning to learn' has grown in popularity. TY can be seen as part of an international shift towards a greater emphasis on learning throughout schooling. For example, TY shares many of the features advocated, for example, by Bransford *et al*, (2000) which in turn influenced the work of the DEMOS (2005) group mentioned in Chapter 2, and the *Opening Minds* project (Bayliss, 1999).

There are ways in which TY acts as a mirror to the other five years of post-primary schooling. The evidence here relating to, for example, the very limited interdisciplinary work in TY (despite exhortations on the guidelines;) the slow development of varied forms of assessment; and the difficulties encountered in writing TY programmes confirm the prevalence of cultures of professional isolation rather than of collaboration and collegiality. The challenge to build schools as

learning communities, thus, becomes more sharply defined. TY also highlights some of the consequences of selective admission policies at the point of entry. Ambiguous attitudes to TY draw attention to the hegemony in Irish schooling of the eLC and JC and the strongly instrumentalist view of schooling that arises from this and the associated points system for admission to third-level education.

Rogers' analysis of innovations in Chapter 2 suggests that the adoption or rejection of an innovation has consequences that can be classified as desirable versus undesirable, direct versus indirect and anticipated versus unanticipated. Applying this framework to some of what has emerged about TY in this study generates Table 7. 9 as illustrative of some consequences.

TABLE 7.9 SOME EXAMPLES OF CONSEQUENCES OF TY, *AFTER ROGERS, 1995, P.412*

Desirable	Increased student maturity. Improved student-teacher relationships. Some classrooms become more democratic. Closer links between schools and communities. Increased student motivation for eLC.
Undesirable	Inequalities between those who spend 5 and those who spend 6 years in post-primary schooling. TY is often seen as a 'parallel universe' in opposition to eLC.
Direct	Students spend an extra year in school. TY provides extensive opportunities for teachers to engage in curriculum development.
Indirect	TY students tend to be appointed to positions of responsibility in school in 5th and 6th year. TY students score, on average, higher points in eLC than those who don't follow the programme. New practices of curriculum support for schools developed since TY mainstreaming.
Anticipated	Schools would need support to implement TY –support services.
Unanticipated	Patterns of student uptake. TY as a fertile arena for innovation possibly has inhibited reform of JC and eLC. Support for TY still needed 14 years after mainstreaming.

While Rogers analysis is helpful in understanding TY's diffusion through the system, the modification of the original concept – the domestication of TY by schools – raises questions as to how firmly TY is now 'embedded in the system' (Ireland, Department of Education, 2004). Unfortunately, 'embedded in the system' perhaps misses the dynamic nature of TY's interaction with the rest of schooling, with its capacity to change teachers' understanding of their work, their interaction with students and, ultimately, the culture within schools. 'Embedded' is not, of

course, too far removed from 'buried' and this is a further paradox concerning domestication. By removing the more radical dimensions of TY's aspirations, not least by allowing it to be colonized by values associated with the points system, the programme is less threatening to the *status quo* of existing power relations and, so, more comfortably 'embedded' in the system. This presents particular challenges – and opportunities – in the development and implementation of Transition Units.

Throughout this study, TY has emerged as a relevant, imaginative and challenging educational innovation that has enriched the schooling experience of many young people and enhanced the professional development of their teachers. At the same time, an undercurrent of resistance, often covert, can be detected. Much of this resistance is inadvertent and unconscious, based on deeply held assumptions about the role and purposes of schooling. TY poses awkward questions about existing organisational arrangements and cultural practices within schools. In holding up a mirror to ingrained traditions of schooling, TY provides a singular service.

Schooling in Ireland continues to adjust to the implications of universal secondary education, introduced in 1967. The challenge for post-primary schools to respond meaningfully to the learning needs of adolescents and to engage and motivate them for living as full human beings in modern society is an enormous one. Because of the weight of history, tradition and established power bases, the aspiration to universal secondary education meets its greatest challenge among the children of those who themselves have not benefited from schooling.

As social beings, relationships are at the heart of being human. One of the greatest challenges faced by modern society is how people from diverse backgrounds and with differing beliefs can work collaboratively in solving problems. A basic learning requirement from a young age is how to function in a group, how to get on with other people, how to communicate, adapt and share responsibility. Traditionally, much of school life is organised as if this didn't matter, that individual effort alone – whether by student or teacher - is sufficient. The criterion for success should be how

we engender a passion for learning, develop a willingness to engage further in the wider human conversation, and remain open to seeking understanding and meaning throughout life. TY highlights the centrality of the teacher-student relationship in learning and shows how, despite resistance, imaginative innovations can begin to bring about deep change in schools, so that they become genuine communities characterised by learning and caring.

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Appendix 1   Questionnaire

February 2003

National University of Ireland, Maynooth
Maynooth, Co. Kildare, Ireland

Department of EDUCATION
Head: John Coolahan

Dear Teacher,

As you may know, the Principal in the school where you work has agreed that the school takes part in a research project related to the Transition Year Programme. The work, commissioned by the Department of Education and Science, involves seeking the viewpoints of a variety of stakeholders. The attached questionnaire has been designed to elicit views from teachers. I would be most grateful if you would volunteer to complete it.

Obviously, when I am at the writing-up stage no school will be mentioned by name. Furthermore, you can rest assured that any responses and comments which you make will remain anonymous.

The questionnaire runs to nine pages and should take about 15 or 20 minutes to complete. Your responses will be a combination of ticking boxes, ranking by 1,2 and 3 and some open-ended answers. Additional comments about the Transition Year programme in your school are most welcome.

Many thanks for your co-operation which is much appreciated.

Yours sincerely

_____

Gerry Jeffers
Lecturer   Tel 01-7086087   Fax 7084610   E-mail
gerard.jeffers@may.ie

Teacher Questionnaire – Transition Year Programme (TYP)

1. What **subjects** do you teach?

    a) in Transition Year_____

    b) in other programmes (Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, LCVP, LCA,)

_____

2. How many **years** have you been teaching? *(please tick one box)*
    A) less then 5 years ☐   B) 6-10 years ☐

    D)11-20 years ☐   E) More than 20 years ☐

3. What is your **Employment status?** *(please tick one box)*
A) Permanent wholetime ☐   B) Permanent job-sharing ☐

C) Temporary wholetime ☐   D) Eligible part-time ☐
E) Part-time ☐

4. What is your **Post of Responsibility**? *(please tick one box)*
A) Principal or Deputy Principal ☐   B) Assistant Principal ☐

C) Special Duties Post holder ☐   D) No post ☐

5. Please name any **extra curricular activities** within the school for which you have responsibility?

_____

_____

_____

6. Which **gender** are you? *(Please tick one box)*   Male ☐   Female ☐

7. Today's date _____

8. Below are some statements about the aims of a TY programme. How do you see each one in terms of <u>the school where you work</u>? *(Please tick one box in each case)* You may add a comment if you wish.

OVERALL GOALS	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
TY gives students a broad educational experience					
Students develop well in the absence of examination pressure					
TY advances students' maturity					
Students are better equipped for a Leaving Certificate programme after a TY					
TY orientates students well to adult and working life					
Students become more independent learners through TY					

Comments

9. How do you see the specific TY programme that has been devised in this school? *(Please tick one box in each case)* You may add a comment if you wish.

THE PROGRAMME	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Our programme is well-thought out					
Our programme is well-tailored to our students' needs					
Our programme has breadth and balance					
Our programme presents students and teachers with good opportunities for learning beyond the classroom					
Our programme provides students with intellectual challenge					
The assessment techniques used in TY are appropriate					
Our approach to evaluation is progressive					

Comments

_____

_____

10. What, in your opinion, are the main strengths of this school's TY programme?

_____

_____

_____

11. Here are some statements about Transition Year and students. Again your perspective in relation to your own school is sought. *(Please tick one box in each case).* You may add a comment if you wish.

STUDENTS	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Students become more confident					
Students' thinking and problem-solving skills are enhanced through TY					
Student develop technical skills					
Students develop academic skills					
Students show little interest in TY					
Students who follow a TY programme achieve higher results in the Leaving Certificate than those who don't					
Students become more socially aware					
The TY programme has a low status among students					
Students become more socially competent					
Students become more motivated and self-directed as learners					
TY assists students clarify career goals					

Comments

_____

_____

12. In your opinion, what, if any, are the benefits to students from Transition Year?

_____

_____

13. In your opinion, what, if any, difficulties or negative features for students result from Transition Year?

_____

_____

_____

14. Below are some statements about teachers in relation to the TYP. What is your attitude to these statements as they apply <u>to your own school</u> <u>situation?</u> *(Please tick one box in each case).* You may add a comment if you wish.

TEACHERS -General	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Teaching TY promotes the professional development of teachers					
Teachers find mixed-ability classes difficult					
Teachers respond well to the freedom and flexibility to design relevant programmes					
Teachers develop skills in TY which enhance their teaching in other years					
Teachers would prefer a prescribed syllabus for their subjects					
The programme has a low status among teachers					
Teachers would prefer a 3 year Leaving Cert. programme					
Teachers find that there is a lack of resources for TY					
Devising and operating new forms of assessment is difficult					
TY promotes teamwork among teachers					

Comments:

_____

_____

15. Here are further statements in relation to teaching TYP. What are your views as they apply to yourself? *(Please tick one box in each case).* You may add a comment if you wish.

TEACHERS -Personal	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
I like teaching Transition Year classes					
I would prefer a prescribed syllabus for my subject					
I like teaching mixed-ability classes					
I like the freedom and flexibility which TY offers					
I welcome the varied forms of assessment in TY					
I like using active teaching and learning methodologies					
I would prefer a 3 year Leaving Certificate programme					
Teaching TY has helped my development as a teacher					
I would like more time for planning TY classes with colleagues					
I would like more in-service training for TY					

Comments:

_____

_____

16. How do you see the organisation of the programme within your school? *(Please tick one box in each case).* You may add a comment if you wish.

ORGANISATION	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Our TY programme is well co-ordinated					
Parents of 3rd year students are well informed about TY					
Our written TY programme is very good					
Parents are kept well informed about activities and events during TY					
Class sizes are too big					

Comments:

17. What THREE factors within the school contribute most, in your opinion, to the success of the TY programme? *(Please rank by Number : 1 for most important, 2 for second most important , 3 for third most important)*

IN-SCHOOL FACTORS 1	POSITION BY RANK
Support from the Board of Management	
The TY programme that we as a school community designed	
The leadership given by the school principal	
The work done by the Transition Year co-ordinator	
The imagination, creativity and expertise of the teaching staff	
The regular review and evaluation of the TY programme	
The work done by the core-team	
The students' interest in and commitment to the TY programme	
Support from parents for our TY programme	
The additional finance that is available for the TY programme	
That it is compulsory/optional *(delete as appropriate)*	
The commitment of the teaching staff to the TY programme	
The co-operation and teamwork between teachers	
Other (name)	

Comments:

18. What THREE factors, in your opinion, <u>militate</u> most against the success of the TY programme? *(Please rank by Number : 1 for most important, 2 for second most important , 3 for third most important)*

IN-SCHOOL FACTORS 2	POSITION BY RANK
A shortage of finance	
Students' lack of interest in and commitment to the TY programme	
Teachers' lack of commitment to the TY programme	
The TY programme that we as a school community designed	
That it is compulsory	
Lack of teacher expertise in active teaching and learning methodologies	
Parents' lack of commitment to the TY programme	
The absence of regular review and evaluation of the TY programme	
Lack of sufficient time for teachers to work together in planning the TY programme	
Lack of teacher expertise in active teaching and learning methodologies	
Limited in-service training	
Other (describe)	

Comments:

_____

_____

_____

_____

19. What external factors, if any, impact either positively or negatively on the Transition Year programme in your school?

Positively	*Negatively*

20. Below are some issues associated with Transition Year. You may wish to write a brief comment about <u>some</u> of them.

Optional v compulsory:

………………………………………………………………….

Selection of students:

………………………………………………………………

Work experience:

………………………………………….…………………….

Part-time jobs:

………………………………………………..………………….

Active teaching and learning methodologies:

…………………………………………...

Homework:

…………………………………………………………………..

Assessment:

………………………………………………………………….

Cross-curricular work:

……………………………………………………….….

'It's a doss year'

…………………………………………………………….…

Programme planning:

……………………………………….………………..

Attendance:

…………………………………………………………..……….

Co-ordination:

…………………………………………………………………...

Attitudes of parents:

…………………………………………………………..

Remediation:

……………………………………………………………….……
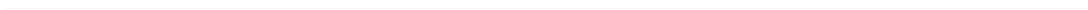
Evaluation:

………………………………………………………………………………..

Resources:

…………………………………………………………………………………

Support:

……………………………………………………………………….………

TY and the Leaving Certificate:

………………………………………….…………………..

Teacher-student relationships:

………………………………………………….……..

21(a). What impact, in your opinion, has the TY programme had on the life of the school?

_____

_____

21(b).While TY differs from school to school, there are certain common features about the programme nationally. Your views are now sought about the national picture. *(Please tick one box in each case).* You may add a comment if you wish.

NATIONAL PICTURE	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
The TYP is a very appropriate programme for 15-16 year olds					
Transition Year is now firmly embedded in the Irish education system					
Transition Year is well supported by the Department of Education and Science					
Transition Year is well regarded within the education system					

Comments

_____

_____

_____

22. Have you any other comments about the TY programme?

_____

_____

_____
You may wish to continue overleaf

_____

Please return to the Transition Year Co-ordinator in your school
or post directly to Gerry Jeffers, Education Department, National
University of Ireland, Maynooth, Co. Kildare.
                              Thank you for your co-operation.

Appendix 2   Interview schedules

Principals

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the research. I appreciate it very much. As you know, the research is for the Department of Education and Science. I am looking at peoples' attitudes to aspects of schooling, particularly the Transition Year. The plan is to get the views of principals, teachers, students and parents in a small selection of schools.

Obviously the experiences, ideas and opinions of principals is central to the study. I'm interested in all viewpoints, whether positive or negative. In anything I write afterwards the name of the school or of actual people will not be used.

To allow me to listen carefully and at the same time to record your views, I would like to use a tape recorder for the interview. Please free to turn off the tape recorder at any time during the interview. I would like you to do this especially if you feel uncomfortable about what you have said or are about to say. You can turn if off like this (DEMONSTRATE). Is that OK with you?

Acknowledge assent.

Have you any questions?

Questions

How did the school get involved in TY in the first place?
How has it evolved within the school?
        (compulsory-optional)
What are the main strengths of the programme?
What have been the main difficulties?
How would you describe the attitudes of the students to TY?
How would you characterise the attitudes of the teachers?
What would you see as the dominant attitudes of parents?
What impact has TY had on the school?

TY co-ordinators

My name is Gerry Jeffers. I work in the Education Department of the University at NUI Maynooth. This school has agreed to co-operate with me on some research I am doing. The research is for the Department of Education and Science. I am looking at peoples' attitudes to aspects of schooling, particularly the Transition Year.

I wish to hear about your experiences, your ideas and your opinions. I'm interested in all viewpoints, whether positive or negative. In anything I write

afterwards the real names of schools will not be used. Similarly, if I quote you, I won't use your actual name.

To allow me to listen carefully and at the same time to record your views, I would like to use a tape recorder for the interview. In case you are worried, the principal will not hear what you say on the tape. As you have agreed to take part, then you are free to turn off the tape recorder at any time during the interview. I would like you to do this especially if you feel uncomfortable about what you have said or are about to say. You can turn if off like this (DEMONSTRATE). Is that OK with you?

Acknowledge assent.

Have you any questions?

How did the school get involved in TY in the first place?
How has it evolved within the school?
        (compulsory-optional)
What are the main strengths of the programme?
What have been the main difficulties?
How would you describe the attitudes of the students to TY?
How would you characterise the attitudes of the teachers?
What would you see as the dominant attitudes of parents?
What impact has TY had on the school?

3 Students

My name is Gerry Jeffers. I work in the Education Department of the University at NUI Maynooth. This school is co-operating with me on some research I am doing. The research is for the Department of Education and Science. I am looking at peoples' attitudes to aspects of schooling, particularly the Transition Year.

I wish to hear about your experiences, your ideas and your opinions. I'm interested in all viewpoints, whether positive or negative. In anything I write afterwards the real names of schools will not be used. Similarly, if I quote one of you, I will deliberately give you a different name so that it will be hard for anyone to recognise the actual person who is being quoted.

To allow me to listen carefully and at the same time to record your views, I would like to use a tape recorder for the interview. In case you are worried, no teachers will hear what you say on the tape. As you have agreed to take part, then you are free to turn off the tape recorder at any time during the interview. I would like you to do this especially if you feel uncomfortable about what you have said or are about to say. You can turn if off like this (DEMONSTRATE). Is that OK with you?

Acknowledge assent.

Have you any questions?

Questions with 3rd years
If you met someone who knew nothing about TY how would you describe it to them?
What do you think might influence a 3rd year student to follow a TY?
What are the attractions , as you see them, of Transition Year?
What are the drawbacks?
How would you describe your parents' attitudes to TY?
How do you think the teachers view the programme?
How is the learning different from what you experienced in 3rd year?

Questions with TY students
If you met someone who knew nothing about TY how would you describe it to them?
Why did you decide to opt for TY?
What have been the highlights of the TY programme?
Have there been disappointments?
How would you describe your parents' attitudes to TY?
How do you think the teachers view the programme?
How is the learning different from what you experienced in 3rd year?

Questions with 5th years
If you met someone who knew nothing about TY how would you describe it to them?
Why did you decide to opt for TY?
What were the highlights of the Ty programme?
Were there disappointments?
How would you describe your parents' attitudes to TY?
How do you think the teachers view the programme?
How was the learning different from what you experienced in 3rd year?
How was the move to 5th year? (LC programme)

Questions with 6th years
If you met someone who knew nothing about TY how would you describe it to them?
Why did you decide to opt for TY?
What were the highlights of the TY programme?
What were the disappointments?
How would you describe your parents' attitudes to TY?
How do you think the teachers view the programme?
How was the learning different from what you experienced in 3rd year?
How was the move to the LC?

4 Parents
Thank you for agreeing to take part in the research. I appreciate it very much. As you know, the research is for the Department of Education and Science. I am looking at peoples' attitudes to aspects of schooling, particularly the Transition Year. The plan is to get the views of principals, teachers, students and parents in a small selection of schools.

Obviously the experiences, ideas and opinions of parents are vital to the study. I'm interested in all viewpoints, whether positive or negative. In anything I write afterwards the name of the school or of actual people will not be used. Indeed, to protect you, I will give each of you a different name in any report I write.

To allow me to listen carefully and at the same time to record your views, I would like to use a tape recorder for the interview. Please free to turn off the tape recorder at any time during the interview. I would like you to do this especially if you feel uncomfortable about what you have said or are about to say. You can turn if off like this (DEMONSTRATE). Is that OK with you?

Acknowledge assent.

Have you any questions?

Questions for Focus Group with Parents
What do you think of the Transition Year?
Why might a parent be keen for his/her son/daughter to do Transition Year?
What reservations might a parent have?
How does a parent get information about the TY programme?
What do you hear about the Transition Year programme from your own children?
What do you hear about the Transition Year programme in this school?
What do you hear about the Transition Year programme, nationally?
Do you notice maturity, skills, orientation to adult and working life in your children develop during or after Transition Year?
Have you any other comments about Transition Year?

Appendix 3   Letter to Policy Makers and Shapers

Contents of letter sent to informants prior to interviews in June/July 2007 followed by a composite list of potential questions.

<div align="center">NUIM headed notepaper</div>

June 2007

Dear
- John MacGabhann (TUI)
- Mary McGlynn (NAPD)
- Eilis Humphreys, (LDS)
- Sinéad Breathnach, (SDPI)
- Anne Looney (NCCA)
- Moira Leyden (ASTI)
- Eamon Stack (DES)
- Marion Lyon (NPCpp)
- Michael Garvey (SLSS)

Further to our recent telephone call, thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of my ongoing research into Transition Year in schools. This research in being undertaken for the purpose of preparing a Ph.D thesis on 'Attitudes to Transition Year' for submission to the Department of Education and Professional Studies at the University of Limerick. At this stage I am keen to ascertain the views of senior personnel in some of the agencies centrally involved in education policy formulation and implementation, including the Inspectorate of the DES, the NCCA, SDPI, SLSS, LDS, NAPD, Teacher Unions and the NPC-pp. During my interview with you I would like to explore the issues set out at the end of this letter.

These issues emerge from data already gathered from students, teachers and parents. A report based on that data was submitted recently to the DES. A copy of that report (including a synopsis) can be accessed at http://www.nuim.ie/academic/education/ by clicking on 'Attitudes to Transition Year' in the section headed 'Notices', though it is not essential that you to read the report in advance of the interview.

Among the issues identified in that report are:
- The 'domestication' of TY by schools, selecting features of the *Transition Year Programme - Guidelines for Schools* that suit their mission and image, and omitting others.
- Students generally tend to be very enthusiastic about TY, often contrasting it with their experiences of the Junior Cycle, which many of them describe as pressurised and examination-driven.
- Students highlight, in particular, TY activities that involve learning beyond conventional classrooms and value classes in which their opinions are sought and listened to.

- Student data suggests a shift towards more active, engaging forms of learning in TY, though they perceive this as more evident in some subjects/modules than in others. Fifth and sixth year students sometimes indicate a tension between the emphasis on a broad education for maturity (in TY) and the demands of the LC and the associated points system.
- Parents tend to be reluctant to generalise about TY beyond the experiences of their own sons and daughters and they frequently state how limited is their knowledge of TY. They tend to identify TY very closely with the TY co-ordinator.
- Parents highlighted the variety of learning situations outside the classroom – trips, musicals, fund-raising projects etc. – as valuable opportunities that enabled their children to relate to each other and to their teachers in more varied ways than within conventional classrooms.
- Teachers generally support the aspirations of TY, recognising how many young people benefit from the programme, especially in their personal and social development. Teachers also regard TY as having positive effects on the school climate, but express reservations about aspects of TY in practice.
- Teachers identify the most important in-school factors that contribute to the perceived success of their programmes as: the work done by the TY co-ordinator; the TY programme that the school community designed; the commitment of the teaching staff; the work done by the core-team; and, the students' interest in and commitment to the TY programme. In-school factors perceived as militating against the success of TY include: lack of ufficient time for teachers to work together in planning the TY programme; limited in-service training; students' lack of interest in and commitment to TY; a shortage of finance; and, the absence of regular review and evaluation of TY. External factors rated by teachers as most important for TY's success are: the work experience opportunities provided by employers; the engagement with the local community, and the involvement and support of parents. The main external factors impeding TY's development are seen as: negative attitudes of some parents; a perception – among some parents, students and teachers – that it is an 'easy' year; part-time work; costs associated with TY.
- Analysis suggests that it is the breadth and the quality of the teaching and learning experiences throughout TY that is key to its success. A persistent challenge is to ensure programme coherence rather than fragmentation. Four features are identified as critical in bringing greater coherence: (a) Planning and writing the TY programme, especially in ways that involve the whole school community. (b) Communicating openly with parents about TY, preferably from their earliest contact with the school. (c) The centrality of good co-ordination for the effective implementation of a TY programme is one of the clearest findings to emerge from this case study. (d) The quality of in-school leadership.
- It appears that, given the high-stakes nature of the LC, TY is in continual danger of being colonised by the LC, if not officially, then in the minds of students, teachers and parents.
- Teachers indicate a need for greater support in designing, developing and implementing TY programmes. Support for 'linear' or 'continuity' subjects seems particularly urgent. Low uptake in schools designated 'disadvantaged' may be partly related to perceptions of high costs associated with TY.
- One of the long-term legacies of the mainstreaming of TY is that it has generated, and sustains, debate among students, parents, teachers, school leaders, policy makers and the wider society about the purposes of schooling.

I would like to record the interview on audio-tape. Unless the interviewee indicates otherwise, it is assumed that all exchanges between the researcher and interviewee are on the record. In reporting on the interview, I will attribute views and insights to interviewees by name and by organisation. I will send you a transcript of those aspects of the interview that I intend to use in the thesis and in any associated publication, for your approval. In the thesis and any further publication I will attribute any quotations used by my informants by name and organisation.

I look forward to meeting you at (time) on (date) at (venue). I expect the interview will take approximately three-quarters of an hour.

Yours sincerely,

_____

Gerry Jeffers

086-0727339
gerard.jeffers@nuim.ie

QUESTIONS TO BE APPENDED

	DES	NCCA	SDPI	LDS	SLSS	NAPD	TUI	ASTI	NPC-pp
When interviewed, young people tend to speak more enthusiastically about TY than about the JC and the LC. Why do you think this is?	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Do you see much difference between the learning goals of TY and those of other programmes?	√	√			√				√
Within TY, linear or continuation subjects (those with direct continuity from JC through TY to LC) are often seen different from other subjects and modules in TY. How do you see their relationship?	√	√					√	√	
In constructing timetables for TY and for other programmes, what do you think should be the duration of class periods?			√	√	√	√			
Learning beyond the classroom is very popular with TY students; do you think such learning experiences need to be increased in	√	√				√	√	√	

Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
other programmes? Why?									
What do you think are the main challenges school leaders face in regard to TY?	√		√	√					
What do think are the main challenges teachers face in regard to TY?	√						√	√	
What do parents see as the main issues associated with TY?									√
Even in schools where TY is well-regarded, there is a reluctance among teachers to commit to writing both the overall TY programme and individual subjects and modules. Why do you think this is?			√	√	√	√	√	√	
Are there particular teacher qualities, competencies and/or qualifications that you think are important for teachers in TY? How do these compare with what you regard as desirable for other school programmes? What are the implications of your views for teachers' continuing professional development?	√			√	√		√	√	
As you know, the uptake of TY varies across schools and within schools. Why do you think this is and do you think anything should be done to change this situation?	√		√	√	√	√			√
How would you like to see TY develop over the coming decade?	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Finally, what do you see as the most urgent curricular changes that need to take place if Irish schools are to become 'schools of the future'?	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

Appendix 4   Letter to School Principals

NUI Maynooth notepaper

20th May 2006

Dear ……,

The slow work of reporting on attitudes to Transition Year continues. I enclose a section (5d) which I would be most grateful if you would read carefully with a view to correcting any factual errors and, if you wish, making suggestions for additions or improvement.

It is probably useful to put this section in context.
The report will include the following sections
1. Introduction
2. Students' perspectives (drawn from all six schools in the study)
3. Teachers' perspectives (drawn from all six schools in the study)
4. Parents' perspectives (drawn from two schools in the study)
5. Individual school profiles
    a. Ash School
    b. Beech School
    c. Chestnut School
    d. Maple School
    e. Oak School
    f. Sycamore School
6. Discussion
7. Conclusion

I am aware that there have been significant changes in each school since this data was gathered so it's important to remember it in its context, that is the period 2002-04. While I would like the material to remain fairly confidential at this stage, if any of your other colleagues would like to read it please pass it on for their comments also. I am sending a separate copy to (named co-ordinator) for her comments also.

I look forward to hearing from you.

With best wishes and many thanks for your continuing co-operation,

_____

Gerry Jeffers
01-7086087   e-mail: gerard.jeffers@nuim.ie