

RESPECTING PARENTS' VIEWS ON TY

Gerry Jeffers is strong protagonist of TY and a regular contributor to TY Update. In this article he comments on the importance of incorporating parents in TY

Back in the days of the initial mainstreaming of Transition Year, questions from teachers and parents often began with phrases like 'In TY do you have to...?'; 'Do the rules allow a school to...?' 'Must the programme include...?'

Responses to the effect that these might not be the most relevant questions, that responsibility was being devolved to individual schools were often met with scepticism, even incredulity and occasionally anger. There is a seductive simplicity in a tradition where the Department of Education makes up precise rules and regulations with little ambiguity and schools just follow them.

The whole tone of *Transition Year Programmes: Guidelines for Schools* represents a different approach. Firstly, they are 'guidelines' not 'rules'. They invite adoption rather than demand compliance.

One of the most radical sentences states: 'Curriculum content is a matter of selection and adaptation by the individual school having regard to these guidelines, the requirements of pupils and the views of parents' (p.5).

This respect for school autonomy has been a very significant feature of TY. Many schools grasp the opportunities to develop truly original TY programmes and discover that it energises the whole school and enables students to experience the personal, social, intellectual and vocational

development the guidelines envisage. Unfortunately, some schools take a minimalist approach, complying with the basics but failing to realise much of TY's potential. This can lead to negative and cynical perspectives on TY among students, parents and even teachers.

Later in the *Guidelines*, there's the suggestion that '... Transition Year can be a catalyst for developing real partnership with parents and the local community' (p.11). 'Real' in this context is particularly relevant, seeming to acknowledge how difficult it is to develop such partnerships. Research into attitudes to TY (Jeffers, 2007, 2015) reveals that parents are anxious to know more about Transition Year, the rationale for particular modules and experiences. They are also keen to be consulted about developing the TY programme.

In the past few years when meeting groups of parents about TY, I have noticed a definite shift in tone. This is because, increasingly, there is a sprinkling of parents who have been TY students themselves. This percentage is going to grow and their perspectives are very enlightening. While some are happy to stand up and talk positively about how they benefitted from TY, others have, at times, been scathing, voicing strong feelings of being short-changed because the school they attended did not take TY seriously enough.

What's invariably encouraging when listening to groups of parents is how **continued...**

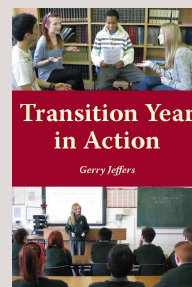


About Gerry Jeffers

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His experience includes working in 2nd-level schools as a teacher and guidance counselor in Ireland and in Kenya, deputy-principal in Firhouse Community College, Dublin and National Co-ordinator of the Transition Year Curriculum Support Service.

Recent publications include 'Learning Through Work Experience' (EdCo, 2014, www.edco.ie/Learning-Through-Work-Experience/Default.4248.html), 'Transition Year in Action' (Liffey Press, 2015, www.theliffeypress.com/transition-year-in-action-by-gerry-jeffers.html) and 'Clear Vision' (Veritas, 2017)



Respecting parents' view on TY *cont...*

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... well the positive stories dominate. Parents love to recount stories of TY's impact on their own sons and daughters. They warm to their children's new-found confidence, their fresh excitement in learning, the discovery of hidden talents, the enthusiastic responses to new opportunities. Parents also show an appreciation of what terms like 'independent-learner', 'decision-making skills' and 'more democratic classrooms' mean in practice.

Greater links between schools and parents in relation to Transition Year seems like 'win-win' situations. Yet, the evidence suggests a reluctance on the part of many schools to engage in 'real' partnership with parents. Culturally, many Irish schools have preferred to keep parents at a 'safe' distance; for example, school reports and parent-teacher meetings often convey limited information. A challenge for many schools is to show genuine respect for parents as legitimate stakeholders, working

in partnership with school personnel. Conversations about TY is a very good place to start. Parents who sit on school boards of management might usefully encourage such initiatives. Parents' Associations seem obvious fora for sharing ideas about how TY might be developed. But, critically, school leaders, including TY coordinators, should be encouraging parents to take part in meaningful conversations about TY and, indeed, all school programmes.

References

- Department of Education (1993) *Transition Year Programme: Guidelines for Schools*, Dublin: DE. Available at https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Curriculum-and-Syllabus/Transition-Year/ty_transition_year_school_guidelines.pdf
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