

Capel, S., Zwozdiak-Myers, P. and Lawrence, J. (2007) The transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school: A case study of a foundation subject - physical education, *Research in Education*, 77, 14-30

The transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school: A case study of a foundation subject - physical education

ABSTRACT

A series of transitions, from class to class, year to year and school to school, are integral to the education system in England. The transfer of pupils from primary to secondary education is an important stage of transition. Models for managing this transfer highlight different aspects of the experience, including social/pastoral integration and curriculum continuity and progression of individual pupils. The purpose of this study was to investigate the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school in relation to physical education. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 secondary school physical education heads of department. Results showed that although all of the heads of department reported the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school to be very important in relation to physical education, this was not translated into practice. There was limited involvement in activities supporting the transfer from primary to secondary school, and what involvement there was placed greater emphasis on activities to support social/pastoral integration than to support continuity and progression of individual pupils during transfer. Some possible reasons for these results are considered, along with some suggestions for further research.

The transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school: A case study of a foundation subject - physical education

INTRODUCTION

A series of transitions, from class to class, year to year and school to school, are integral to the education system in England. Galton, Gray and Rudduck (1999) differentiated between transition (moving from year to year) and transfer (moving from school to school).

Youngman (1980: 13) argued that 'transfer from primary to secondary education should not be considered a special feature of schooling since all educational experience involves the pupil in some kind of adjustment to new situations and demands. Nevertheless it does represent an important stage in education, if only because of the strength and variety of the influences pupils encounter during this period'. The Department of Education and Science (DES, 1987) identified transfer from primary to secondary school as the time at which curriculum continuity and progression of individual pupils is most at risk. Transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school generally coincides with the transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 in the National Curriculum. One purpose of the National Curriculum was to increase curriculum continuity and individual pupil progression. However, results of research to date (e.g. Galton, Morrison and Pell, 2000; Schagen and Kerr, 1999) suggest that although continuity and progression are promoted in National Curriculum documents in England, they are not promoted consistently by schools during the transfer from primary to secondary school.

Curriculum continuity and individual pupil progression are not the only foci during transfer from primary to secondary school. A number of approaches to transfer have been identified. For example, Rudduck, Galton and Gray (1998) identified five approaches by which schools can structure their transfer procedures: curriculum continuity approach; administrative approach; pedagogic approach; pupil-centred approach; approaches which give priority to exploring and explaining the purpose and structure of learning. A model by Derricott (1985) includes three facets in the process of transfer: administrative – in which the goal is to pass on (in both directions) information about pupils, the curriculum and teaching methods; social/pastoral, in which the goal is the smooth adjustment, or integration, of pupils to the new systems in the school; and curricular, in which the goal is to establish curriculum continuity. However, Derricott also highlights discontinuity that can stimulate pupil growth and development. Discontinuity can either be planned, in which there is a general aim to provide continuity of experience, but recognising areas in which a deliberate change in practice is needed, or unplanned.

The specific foci of different approaches to transfer require different activities. Generally, in order to prepare pupils for the social turbulence of transfer to a new school, social/pastoral approaches require the involvement of pupils, whereas in order to achieve planned provision of teaching and learning to facilitate curriculum continuity or continuous development/progress of individual pupils may only require teachers to be involved. For example, visits

by teachers and pupils to each other's schools (e.g. year 6 pupils visiting the secondary school and taking part in some lessons, year 7 pupils returning to their primary school) support social/pastoral integration; meetings of teachers from different schools to discuss, plan and implement related courses and teaching approaches support curricular continuity; and activities such as passing pupils assessment and other relevant records from primary to secondary school or discussions by staff about children with special educational needs support individual pupil progression.

A number of factors influence the focus of the approach taken to transfer and the specific activities undertaken by teachers and schools. Specifically factors influencing continuity and progression were categorised by Lenga and Ogden (2000) as professional and institutional issues; pupil centred issues; and teaching and learning issues. Schagen and Kerr (1999) identified three levels of factors influencing curriculum continuity: system-level factors (the National Curriculum and its assessment; value added analysis, league tables, open enrolment, teachers time and funding); school-level factors (competition between schools (linked to open enrolment), priority given to different needs within a school, autonomy between schools and between subject departments within a school and communication); and classroom-level factors (particularly for secondary teachers – data not being available or unreliable, not trusting the assessment of primary teachers, lack of time to absorb and act on primary information relating to each child).

Much research to date on transfer from primary to secondary school has focused on the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Results of research in the core subjects may not necessarily be applicable to foundation subjects in general and physical education in particular. One particular factor mitigating against promoting curriculum continuity and individual pupil progression in physical education is the structure of the National Curriculum for Physical Education (NCPE). Although there are four strands within the NCPE (acquiring and developing skills; selecting and applying skills, tactics and compositional ideas; evaluating and improving performance; knowledge and understanding of fitness and health), the NCPE is not prescriptive. These four strands are developed through six areas of activity. The same areas of activity are covered in physical education at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. Thus, pupils may be practicing and repeating basic skills in the same activities at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. Further, the background and experiences of pupils in different primary schools could be very different even though they are meeting the requirements of the NCPE. Although this may be true to some extent in other subjects, there is a greater emphasis on gaining new knowledge in a range of topics. The purpose of this study was therefore to investigate the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school in relation to physical education.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

Fourteen secondary school physical education heads of department (10 male and 4 female) in five Local Education Authorities (LEAs) were selected for this research. These LEAs represented four county authorities and one London Borough. These 14 heads of department had been identified as being involved in a range of activities to support the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school in relation to physical education in an earlier part of this study (see Capel, Zwozdiak-Myers and Lawrence, 2003, 2004).

Interviews

Interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 40 minutes and one hour. To ensure consistency of approach one researcher interviewed all 14 heads of department. This interviewer had taught physical education in secondary schools in England. Although every effort was made to keep the conditions for the interviews consistent, the realities of the day-to-day life of physical education teachers resulted in some interviews being conducted during a normal school working day, whilst others were conducted after school or during holiday periods. The interview comprised questions about the perceived importance of transfer of pupils from primary to secondary schools in physical education; activities undertaken to support the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school in physical education and reasons for these; factors constraining support for transfer and potential ways to develop and maintain this support. Follow-up questions were asked specific to responses from each head of department.

Data analysis

Interviews were recorded on audio-cassette tape and then transcribed word-for-word. The transcriptions were checked to ensure that they were an accurate record of each interview. Transcripts were then read in full by two people and responses coded. The three facets in transfer identified by Derricott (1985): administrative; social/pastoral and curriculum continuity and the different levels of factors in the model by Schagen and Kerr (1999): system-level; school-level; and classroom-level were used as the basis of coding structure. After two weeks clean copies of four randomly selected transcripts were re-coded to ensure consistency of interpretation. Direct quotes from interviews are used in the presentation of results to illustrate the key findings.

RESULTS

All 14 heads of department considered the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school in relation to physical education to be important. The main reason given for its importance related to knowing what pupils had covered in primary school so that their previous experience could be built upon. For example, *'it is important in terms of knowing exactly what the pupils have done previously in their primary feeder schools'* (HoD13).

However, the reported importance of transfer did not seem to be matched in practice. Only 3 of the 14 heads of department reported that transfer of pupils was written into their departmental policy. The other 11 heads of

department reported that they were trying to support the transfer of pupils and/or that although information related to transfer informed their planning, this was neither formalised nor written into departmental policy. For example, *'Yes, we have a department policy. I don't think it's actually written down. We just get together as a department at the end of the summer term and plan what we're going to do next term, and we think in terms of what children will have done in year 6'* (HoD10).

Further, although several heads of department indicated that the activities in which they engaged in relation to physical education were part of school-wide activities to support transfer from primary to secondary school, other heads of department did not know what was happening in the rest of the school, or indicated that activities in physical education did not relate to school-wide initiatives or that they did not know if they linked. For example, *'In theory they're supposed to, but I must admit that we, I say we, I have tended to be a little bit of a maverick in the past in terms of deciding what I feel is important for us at any particular given time. If it happens to fit into a school development plan fine, if it doesn't then I try to be creative in the way I state the PE Department's action plan for the next year, two or three years, so that it could have a link if pressed'* (HoD14).

Further evidence to suggest that the importance of transfer may be rhetoric by the teachers which is not followed through consistently in practice comes from schools engaged in making a bid for sports college status giving greater priority to the transfer from primary to secondary school. The reason for this priority was because it was part of the requirements for making a bid – therefore was being undertaken for this specific purpose, not because it was perceived as inherently valuable. For example, *'within the school we have a primary project day. All the year 6 pupils in a primary school take part in a variety of lessons, one of which is physical education. That is our only main contact with them. Our involvement has been precipitated by the Sports College bid – otherwise I don't know how much we'd have been involved'* (HoD5, bidding for Sports College status at the time of the interview); and *'Well, I think in many ways we already do provide support. What we don't do is provide curricular support. Coordinating meaningful curriculum support was all in the planning if we had achieved our Sports College status'* (HoD6, Sports College bid unsuccessful). Without being perceived as inherently valuable it is unlikely that supporting transfer from primary to secondary school will be prioritised and therefore that practice will be developed. Indeed, results showed that practice in sports colleges in supporting transfer from primary to secondary school in physical education was not different to that in other schools – despite the difference in funding and staffing to support initiatives.

These heads of department identified a range of activities in which they engaged to support the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school in physical education. These activities comprised a mixture of formal and informal, e.g. secondary physical education teachers teaching lessons in primary feeder schools, a link teacher meeting with the primary teachers to discuss individual pupils abilities, needs and behaviour, which is then fed back to other members of staff; meetings between primary staff and secondary physical education staff, perhaps through a secondary teacher attending district PE and sports meetings; primary pupils visiting the secondary school

(with visits varying from half a day to a number of days) and undertaken in a number of ways, e.g. intake evenings in which primary pupils and their parents visit the secondary school, primary pupils being taught lessons, engaging in taster events or being involved in fun sports events; secondary teachers giving ideas on/help at primary school sports day; sharing equipment and facilities with the feeder primary schools; asking pupils what they have covered in primary school or discussing with year 7 pupils their primary school physical education experiences and knowledge picked up informally through various activities undertaken. Several secondary schools had a named link teacher whose role included liaison with primary schools. However, for others, an informal approach was taken. For example, *'I'll go over three or four initiatives. I go into primary school meetings, when they have district PE and sports meetings. Then it's ideas on sports day and how we can be of help, and it's a sharing of equipment and facilities with the feeder primary schools.....The main ones would be the primary taster event'* (HoD4) and *'we invite children from the primary schools to come and use the facilities, introducing ourselves and the facilities. We have good knowledge of what they do from our visits and communication with teachers in the primary schools, but it's rather informal'* (HoD13).

Different activities are undertaken for different purposes and therefore have different foci. All 14 heads of department highlighted activities in which they engaged to make the transfer for pupils as smooth as possible in social/pastoral terms. For example, *'We have an intake evening, where pupils come in to meet their form teachers. We also have two days which are taken over by primary pupils coming into the school. We have initiatives where we invite our pupils to take part in sports events, so for example we've got an athletics day just for primary schools. When the year 7 pupils come in, on their first day, they will be the only pupils here, alongside the year 11. So the aim is to make the transition smooth for them'* (HoD9).

However, fewer heads of department highlighted activities in which they engaged to support curriculum continuity and individual pupil progression. Responses were generally vague as to exactly what activities were undertaken. In relation to curriculum continuity, responses suggested that generic information about the National Curriculum at Key Stage 2 was used. For example, *'We have to assume, to some extent, that Key Stage 2 will be delivered according to the demands of the National Curriculum. If that's the case then we know what they've covered, or should have covered'* (HoD7). However, the NCPE is not prescriptive and therefore pupils' background and experiences in primary school could be very different even though they are meeting the requirements of the NCPE. Indeed, these heads of department reported different practice in different primary schools and in the same primary school in different years.

Responses also suggested that some activities were undertaken in relation to individual pupil progression. For example, *'we have in the new term a meeting with the primary teachers. We look at the lists of pupils and see if there are any comments or whatever, what expectations I need to have of pupils in terms of ability and maybe also behaviour, and then I will feed that back to my members of staff. I know what they should have covered in PE'* (HoD12). However, responses by other heads of department suggested that generally documentation about

individual pupils was either not detailed enough or was too detailed to be of use, or secondary teachers did not trust primary teachers judgements about the level of ability of individual pupils. Thus, for many of these heads of department, the various activities undertaken, including the transfer of documentation, did not provide information either about the curriculum pupils had followed or their individual levels of ability that enabled them to improve curriculum continuity or individual pupil progression.

This resulted in several heads of department reporting that they adopted a fresh start approach when pupils entered the secondary school at the beginning of year 7. For example, *'The documentation that came through reported what level they were at. We found that with one or two schools we could act fairly confidently on that, others it was almost a meaningless figure. Although we wanted to start with using that information, we decided we'll start as if they were born at eleven when they come here. We start year 7 with the attitude of mind that it's their first day of their existence. We have developed a programme that's designed to work on generic skills, that's more of a foundation course. We see the pupils and assess them ourselves within the first five to six weeks. We can then organise them as we do'* (HoD14) and *'Although the documentation should be important in planning, the reality is that we get a minimal amount of information about pupils, and what they've done in primary school. So in that sense – and that's the critical thing, it doesn't influence our planning. I would say that we start fresh, and the reason for that is we don't actually have any information to move us in a different direction'* (HoD6).

Heads of Department were asked what constraints there were to supporting the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school. Responses focused on constraints to supporting curriculum continuity and individual pupil progression and included system-, school-, and classroom-level factors. Four system-level factors were reported: the National Curriculum – particularly that it was not being followed by primary school teachers (for example, *'I think the National Curriculum for PE at Key Stage 2 and 3 promotes continuity and progression in a realistic way. But I'm not convinced that feeder schools necessarily follow it'* (HoD8); and *'There's this huge gap between what we think they're doing and what they're actually doing. Because we're basing it completely on the national curriculum and they are not. Realistically, I think it's more to do with the fact that it's not actually being delivered at Key Stage 2, therefore there's a skill gap'* (HoD11)); National Curriculum levels of assessment – particularly that the level descriptors can be interpreted differently by different teachers and therefore that pupils working at a particular level may have different levels of ability (for example, *'I have a degree of concern about the level criteria. If you read through the levels, it's very subtle and difficult to distinguish sometimes between two particular levels. Even distinguishing between a level 4 and a level 6 is not easy. I think it's difficult in that sense to look at the progression of the pupil'* (HoD6)); time: both for secondary and primary teachers to support transfer in relation to physical education, but particularly for primary teachers the impact of limited teacher time on physical education teaching (for example, *'Teachers in our feeder schools are expected to teach a number of subject areas, so I can see that there would be problems initiating it'* (HoD8) and *'It's not that primaries can't provide information, other than generalized information, which may be useful, but it would be very difficult to ask them to provide more detailed information because of the pressures that are on them'* (HoD6)). Cost and finance and

staffing were also mentioned. For example, *'In terms of what they've done in practice, that's part of going around to the primaries, discussing with them their problems and their aspirations and what they would like from me. But that involves time, cost and staffing so it was limited to one school for a number of weeks. So you need to bring it back down to practicality'* (HoD14) and *'I think [playing a role in providing support for primary teachers] has always been something we should have done, but the problem has been there's no time or finance to do it'* (HoD11).

Three school-level factors were identified: Priority given to different needs within a school (for example, *'Pressures on primary school teachers, numeracy and literacy and that sort of thing. It's just one more thing you're putting on them isn't it?'* (HoD7)); Autonomy between schools, resulting in differences in physical education between primary schools (for example, *'Differences between the physical education programmes in primary schools. Poor gymnastics, dance, swimming, rugby. I think there's one big problem, the QCA schemes of work are excellent, but a lot of primary schools will tell you they don't use them'* (HoD7)); and differences within schools, which can relate to staff turnover (for example, *'The constant problem is the huge turnover of staff in primaries. Nobody seems to stay longer than eighteen months. One problem is that certain schools are temporarily fairly strong in an area. The head teacher at school X is an ex-PE person who's very keen, employed a specialist PE person, particularly gymnastics, therefore the children were a very good standard; much higher than children from other schools. We tried to adapt a scheme of work to match the needs of these children. But then that person left and then suddenly the children coming in are no longer at that level, because the specialism isn't there'* (HoD11)); and communication (for example, *'it's to do with information coming through, and how much they are prepared to put down on paper for us to look at'* (HoD12)).

Three classroom-level factors were identified: Availability/usefulness of information and paperwork sent from primary to secondary schools (for example, *'I would say that we start again. The problem lies in the information that we get from primary school. The format that it's in is not useful for us. And what's more it's a waste of time the primary schools filling them in, which is sad. They fill them in because they have to, not because it's good information for us'* (HoD2); *'We try, but no information at all comes to us from primary schools regarding PE. The only thing that may come through by about the end of October, is their file, which might say 'Good at games' or something like that. We don't get any information related to national curriculum'* (HoD3) and *'We do have links with the primary school, but the biggest issue is on the paperwork side. It's just not compatible, it doesn't run through from primary to secondary school'* (HoD4)); Lack of trust in primary teachers' judgement (for example, *'It's all great, if it happens. If you've got a PE teacher in a primary school whose only done eighteen hours training in PE, they're not going to be able to teach [the NCPE] effectively'* (HoD7) and *'teachers in the feeder schools that teach PE are not necessarily PE specialists'* (HoD8)); and Lack of time to absorb information (for example, *'We get an awful lot of paperwork from the primary schools about pupils in PE. It's not in the format that we can use, that we'd like it, therefore we generally look at issues. I think we could make more use of that, but it's*

just the time, with 260 or so lots of paperwork coming in, it's just impossible to sit and go through all the fine detail' (HoD2)).

In addition, factors at different levels were linked together as constraints. For example, *'I think there's always going to be problems in Key Stage 2 in terms of the training for PE with regard to primary teachers, and with the facilities and resources that are available. Constraints at Key Stage 2 mean that maybe the national curriculum can't be carried out as it's intended to be' (HoD9), 'They're not PE trained. They do what they can, but they're not well funded, they're not well resourced, there's not a lot of PE time available in primary schools, they've got too many other things on their plate, the training isn't there, the children are really enthusiastic, but how much can you get into a pint pot?' (HoD2).*

In relation to potential ways to develop and maintain support for transfer responses also related to curriculum continuity and individual pupil progression. The three levels of factors were also identified. Three potential system-level factors were identified: Better understanding by secondary schools of what is happening at Key Stage 2 (for example, *'It's about getting a greater understanding of what is happening in Key Stage 2, and then identifying the kind of support that is needed (HoD1))*; Assessment (for example, *'the only thing I think which would be concrete, although in itself fraught with some problems, would be if levels of attainment were issued, and of course they don't have to do that, and nor are there any plans to do that in future in relation to physical education. So, it's us making an assessment of pupils in the early days, and deciding what sort of level they are, and where we're going to start' (HoD6)* and *'Currently the PE advisor is piloting a system of assessment within primary schools, which involves transfer of information from primary to secondary schools. So there will be a document about each child which is formalised and which is consistent across primary schools. I think the problems he will have is implementing it' (HoD5))*; and Funding (for example, *'I think the way forward should be top heavy funding in Key Stage 2, so PE teaching can be very high quality, and so the teaching ratios are very low' (HoD9)).*

Two potential school-level factors were identified: Priority given to physical education (for example, *'With numeracy and literacy now firmly established, there needs to be a much greater support for primary school delivery of PE' (HoD1))*; and Communication (for example, *'I suppose we have improved communication by doing the visits and seeing the pupils actually working, and getting a better idea of their progress. I think we should continue with the meetings because they're very useful. We need to get more involved in terms of visiting the schools, seeing Year 6 pupils at work, then maybe we'd be able to spot more of the problems that they've been having in certain areas and then be supportive and of help to the teachers. We need also to improve the quality of the information that we receive from them, which brings us back to the old problem of time' (HoD12)).*

Four potential classroom-level factors were identified: Improving timing and quality of information sent from primary to secondary schools (for example, *'I think that formal written feedback from the school through the transfer document is essential. It would be extremely beneficial to the department to have access to these*

documents. Also, we need to look at the documents and even perhaps to devise a pro-forma, which is more beneficial to us' (HoD13)); Teacher confidence/knowledge (for example, 'One of the roles I think we're trying to play is to build confidence in some of those teachers in terms of their delivery of PE' (HoD9) and 'Our main worry is that we have very little expertise in Key Stage 2 PE. I've noticed when we go to primary schools, although we're confident within ourselves and confident within PE, at the same time we're not sure whether our approach is totally appropriate for Key Stage 2 children. But we are currently looking at training our staff specifically to teach children at Key Stage 2' (HoD5)); Support for primary staff. This requires trust between primary and secondary teachers and these heads of department recognised that different primary schools and different individual teachers need different types of support and that well qualified and confident primary teachers may well take offence at offers of support (for example, 'For years, if our time allows, if our Head allows and things fall into place, we've offered support. The hard pressed primaries like a bit of help and assistance and some suggestions. It's almost taking on the role of the Area PE Advisor. You've got to be careful about how you approach people, to make sure that you don't go in as the guru and are the answer to all their prayers, because primary teachers can often take offence. We could extend that' (HoD14)); and 'It is completely wrong to go into primary schools and say you can't do it. Look at me, I'm the expert, I'm going to show you how. Rather, I say, I'm here to support if you need it. The kind of support I would like to give, if it helps, is this and this. I think that schools cry out for that. I could say it's a horrible day, you've got fifty, seven-year-olds, you can't go outside, you don't want them to miss their PE, you can do these useful activities in the hall, they'll enjoy them, they'll be fun, and they'll learn something. Will that be a help? Can I come and show you? I've done this in some primary schools, and they really appreciate it' (HoD3)). Some schools had a link teacher to co-ordinate support to their primary schools. For example, 'We have to have somebody, a link person, who works with primary schools to identify what they actually want from us, come up with some form of assessment, so we get a baseline assessment, so we can then tailor our schemes of work to match the need (HoD11).

DISCUSSION

The results of this small scale qualitative study showed that these 14 heads of department identified that transfer from primary to secondary school was important in physical education. However, results suggested that this was not translated into practice consistently. This was demonstrated by the majority of these heads of department reporting that they had neither formalised nor written their practice into departmental policy. Rather, transfer seemed to be something that they were trying to do, but rather informally. There are a number of possible reasons for policies not including specific reference to transfer. These include activities to support the transfer of pupils in relation to physical education being initiated fairly recently, with the policy document not having been rewritten to reflect this. A second possible reason could be conflicting priorities. Although activities to support the transfer of pupils in relation to physical education are identified as important, they may be seen as less important than other activities in which physical education departments are involved. These other activities therefore take precedence in the limited time available to staff in physical education departments. Some heads of department may therefore

perceive it to be safer not to identify the transfer of pupils in the departmental policy – as they may be measured against what is written in the policy document. On the other hand, it may be that there are weaknesses in the purpose, and writing, of policy documents. For example, a policy document is written as and when required, but is not then used to inform practice and/or the link between policy and practice is not made, resulting in little notice being taken of it. Further, it could be that transfer is ‘taken for granted’, and a concept to which they only pay lip-service.

Further, practice in physical education seemed to be largely uninformed by or not linked into school-wide activities. This result suggests that, at least in some schools where social/pastoral activities are undertaken across subjects, physical education may not be maximising opportunities to promote curriculum continuity and individual pupil progression. Thus, whilst continuity and progression from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 are promoted in the NCPE, in practice there is little continuity and progression between primary and secondary schools in physical education. Without promoting curriculum continuity and progression it is unlikely that this explicit aim of the National Curriculum will be achieved.

Further evidence of practice not matching rhetoric was highlighted by the two schools involved in bids for sports college status reporting this as a reason for giving greater priority to supporting the transfer from primary to secondary school. Being required to develop activities to support the transfer of pupils may be one way of making this happen, as it gives it equal priority with other aspects of work which are required and measured. However, raising its importance as part of the requirements for making a bid for sports college status does not necessarily result in it being perceived as valuable and therefore informing practice, whether or not a bid is successful. Further, it may not be the best way to proceed if teachers are not able to identify specific benefits associated with undertaking such activities. In such a situation, engaging in activities to support transfer without the commitment required to make them work successfully, or without identifying clearly the purpose and then deciding on specific activities to achieve this purpose, may not make a difference to what happens in schools, to raising standards and in particular to pupils’ experiences. Indeed, it is suggested that it does not inform practice, as the practice in relation to activities to support transfer of pupils in physical education in the two schools in the sample which had sports college status was not different to that in other schools.

The major reason given by these heads of department for the importance of transfer from primary to secondary school was knowing what pupils had covered in primary school. This would suggest that curriculum continuity and individual pupil progression was important. However, this did not seem to be matched by what happened in practice. A range of activities in which schools engaged to support the transfer from primary to secondary school in physical education was identified. These activities are undertaken for different purposes and therefore have different foci. Although all 14 heads of department reported being involved in activities which make the transfer for pupils as smooth as possible for social/pastoral integration, fewer heads of department highlighted activities in relation to supporting curriculum continuity and individual pupil progression. Thus, activities to support

social/pastoral integration were prioritised above activities to support continuity and progression and a fresh start approach was adopted in many schools when pupils enter the secondary school at the beginning of year 7. One head of department described this as imagining that pupils were born at age 11. Making a fresh-start approach could be planned discontinuity. However, results suggest that this was unplanned, resulting more from lack of applicable/useful information, lack of confidence in what primary teachers are teaching in physical education or to the diversity of experience of incoming year 7 pupils from a number of different primary feeder schools.

A range of factors, at system-, school- and classroom-level (Schagen and Kerr, 1999), constraining the development of activities to support curriculum continuity and individual pupil progression were identified. However, results did not identify all of the factors Schagen and Kerr identified within each of these levels. For example, teachers did not explicitly refer to constraints of value-added, league tables and open-enrolment at system-level; or to competition between schools at school-level. There may be a number of reasons why these factors were less prominent. First, they may be implicit in the constraints identified. On the other hand, physical education teachers may focus on the needs of pupils and curriculum in their own subject and are less concerned about the broader context in which they are working – both the system and the school.

Teachers time was identified as the major constraining factor. One reason for lack of time was that activities to support the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school in physical education may compete for time with other activities. If secondary physical education staff have additional responsibilities, e.g. head of year or teaching another subject, they have less time to undertake activities to support the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary schools generally, and in particular, for the detailed work needed to support curriculum continuity and progression. Likewise, teachers have to prioritise a number of competing demands. These include government initiatives which have been introduced in recent years both between physical education and other subjects, e.g. literacy and numeracy in primary schools, and within physical education, e.g. the introduction of a new NCPE (2000) and, in secondary schools, changes to GCSE, AS level, A level. Consequently, teachers cannot prioritise them all. This may result in low priority being given to physical education in general. This, in turn, may also result in primary-secondary transfer being given low priority within physical education. Similar findings have also been identified by others. Lance (1994: 64) suggested ‘continuity between key stage 2 and 3 is one victim of the overload which has become a feature of our education system’ and Jarman (1997) concluded that limited time and expertise of primary school staff were factors limiting both the opportunity to develop links, as well as limiting the curriculum experienced by primary pupils.

The availability/usefulness of information and documentation about pupils during the transition from primary to secondary school was identified as constraining the development of continuity and progression. Some of these heads of department reported that primary schools did not send any details about the Key Stage 2 curriculum experiences of pupils or about individual pupils’ levels, achievements, strengths, weaknesses and/or progress; other primary schools used county generated proformas that detailed only the programmes of study year groups had

covered; yet other primary schools had assessed their year 6 pupils and allocated end of key stage levels of achievement. Generally, secondary schools did not find the documentation useful. A secondary school might be sceptical about the accuracy of these pupils' end of key stage levels and question the judgement of their primary colleagues. Also, primary teachers are less likely to spend time completing documentation that is perceived to be of limited use or not referred to by secondary schools. This also has implications for the value added analysis of pupils and prompts many secondary heads of department to develop their own assessment strategies for incoming year 7 pupils; often linked to a fresh-start approach. Unless primary and secondary teachers both understand what information is needed, in what format and how it will be used to inform practice, each may feel as though s/he is wasting time. Moreover, primary and secondary teachers must have a shared understanding of, for example, the meaning of terminology and of what each of the National Curriculum levels mean, and are using the same language to describe the same thing.

A number of potential ways of developing continuity and progression were identified by these heads of department. These focused mainly around classroom-level factors. One of the major ways was continuing professional development for staff – particularly secondary staff supporting primary staff. In such a model, the needs of individual members of staff and schools can be identified and addressed. Williams (1997) found that involvement of specialist secondary school staff with the primary school acted as a motivator for both staff and pupils, and enhanced the ability of primary school staff to deliver the National Curriculum. There are, however, a few problems with this model.

First, secondary physical education specialists may not have the expertise to cover the range of development needed. For example, primary schools may ask for/need help in specific areas of physical education, e.g. gym/dance/swimming/rugby. However, secondary staff may not have appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding of the activity and/or do not feel competent enough to teach and promote pupils learning among this age group. Thus, they may be unable to support such requests or may try, but offer inappropriate support or continuing professional development.

Second, although secondary specialists may be confident in their knowledge of Key Stage 2 physical education, their expertise may not be welcomed. Although support with lesson planning, sharing and use of facilities/equipment, collaborative work and team teaching or continuing professional development may be embraced by some primary teachers, other primary teachers may perceive it to be a threat and view it with suspicion and fear of losing autonomy. 'Given their more flexible budgets and more favourable staffing levels, secondary schools are often initiators of link programmes and this leaves them prey to criticism from primary schools that they are merely trying to recruit pupils, or dominate the curriculum' (Lance, 1994: 46). In an analysis of continuity and progression from 5 to 16 years, the National Foundation for Educational Research (1995: 45) found that 'partnership rests on relationships between individual teachers, so for that reason it is important to advance gently'. To establish trust and respect for one another as professional practitioners requires time to nurture

and to build effective working relationships. Consistency of teachers within and between schools is vitally important if this is to be facilitated, yet a factor identified by secondary heads of department was the frequent turnover of staff in their primary feeder schools; if individual staff leave the relationship is likely to founder.

CONCLUSION

In line with results of other research, results of this study suggest that, within this one foundation subject, rhetoric about the importance of transfer from primary to secondary school is not matched by practice. Although continuity and progression are promoted in the NCPE, secondary teachers only pay lip service to it during the transfer from primary to secondary school. There was limited involvement in activities supporting the transfer from primary to secondary school, and what involvement there was placed greater emphasis on activities to support social/pastoral integration than to support continuity and progression, and within this, greater emphasis was placed on individual pupil progression than curriculum continuity. Further research is needed to look at why social/pastoral integration is prioritised above continuity and progression, even though activities to support the social/pastoral integration of pupils during transfer could be undertaken on a whole school basis rather than by the physical education staff alone, whereas activities to support continuity and progression must be undertaken by physical education staff alone. Further research is needed into the impact of lack of continuity and progression on pupils. Other research should compare physical education with other foundation subjects.

There are a number of other areas in which further research would be beneficial. The secondary school physical education heads of department interviewed in this study were selected as they identified a number of activities they undertook to support transfer in an earlier part of this study (see Capel, Zwozdiak-Myers and Lawrence, 2003, 2004). It is important that the perceptions of secondary heads of department who did not identify any engagement in activities to support the transfer of pupils in relation to physical education are also studied. Likewise, effective development and maintenance of activities requires commitment from both primary and secondary teachers. It is important that further research is undertaken to investigate primary teachers' perceptions of the transfer of pupils in relation to physical education and their perspective on the activities in which they engage to support this transfer. Interviewing primary and secondary teachers working in the same cluster of schools would provide a rich source of data. Another rich source of data would be pupils' perceptions of their experiences of transfer from primary to secondary school in physical education.

With limited time and competing priorities, activities to support transfer may not be given the attention they need in order to work effectively. Further research should consider whether the outcomes of activities undertaken in practice are achieved, e.g. whether they are effective in terms of integration of pupils into secondary schools or whether the learning of all pupils is maximised, standards are raised, pupils are better motivated and/or have a more positive attitude towards physical education. It will be important to include pupils' perceptions in such research. If activities designed to support curriculum continuity and individual pupil progression in physical education from

primary to secondary school are found to raise standards, the positive benefits of promoting and engaging in activities to support the transfer of pupils can be made explicit. At present, they seem to be largely implicit. Good practice could be identified and shared to help other teachers to improve continuity and progression in pupils learning in physical education. This may encourage teachers to prioritise, and engage in, activities to support transfer over other activities, as well as in making decisions about activities in which to engage to support the transfer of pupils in relation to physical education.

A number of factors were identified as constraining the development of continuity and progression in physical education. These included system-, school- and classroom-level factors, as identified by Schagen and Kerr (1999). However, many of the potential developments identified in this study to improve support for transfer from primary to secondary school were, at least to some extent, those over which these heads of department perceive they have some control, could themselves lead or contribute to, e.g. developing their own and primary teachers' subject knowledge, providing support and training for primary teachers, the use of link teachers. Others identified include those which primary and secondary teachers can work on collaboratively, e.g. improving the appropriateness/usefulness of information sent from primary to secondary schools. Many of these related to staff development, both for themselves and for primary staff. They also recognised that in order to achieve this they needed good communication with primary staff and to develop trust. This requires time. This result suggests that although there are a range of factors constraining the development of continuity and progression between primary and secondary schools, heads of department identify themselves as integral to potential developments. However, constraints, particularly system-level, such as teachers' time and funding and school-level, such as priority given to different needs, autonomy between schools, may prevent these good intentions being turned into practice. However, constraints need to be addressed at system-level, both at government level and within the teaching profession itself, and at school-level by senior management within schools in order to enable classroom-level activities to be successful. However, further research is also needed into the interaction of system-, school- and classroom-level factors.

Finally, these results suggest that although various models (e.g. that by Derricott, 1985 and similar such models) are useful in describing practice in the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school in physical education, they are not sufficient to understand practice in the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school in physical education. Greater depth is needed to a model in order to understand and change practice. This greater depth should include the different levels at which different aspects of the model operate, i.e. system-, school- and classroom-levels. Such a model could be particularly influential in developing curriculum continuity and individual pupil progression in the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school in physical education.

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