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A qualitative exploration of the transition experience of students from a high school to a senior high school in rural Western Australia

Amiee-Jade Pereira
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A Qualitative Exploration of the Transition Experience of Students from a High School
to a Senior High School in Rural Western Australia

Ms Amiee-Jade Pereira

A Report Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Award of Bachelor of Arts (Psychology) Honours
Faculty of Community Studies, Education and Social Sciences
Edith Cowan University

October 2005

Declaration

I declare that this written assignment is my own work and does not include:

(i) material from published sources used without proper acknowledgement;

or

(ii) material copied from the work of other students.

Signature

_____ (Amiee-Jade Pereira)

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Running head: ADOLESCENTS AND SCHOOL TRANSITIONS

Adolescents and School Transitions: A Review of the Literature

Amice-Jade Pereira

A report submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the

Requirements for the Award of

Bachelor of Arts Honours,

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August 2005

Declaration

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Signature

_____ (Amice-Jade Pereira)

Abstract

This review outlines literature on the normative high school transitions that occur during adolescence. Research examines factors affecting the school transition experience (e.g., school size, structure, feeder patterns, and the additive affect of multiple school transitions), student outcomes (e.g., academic performance, self-esteem and psychological symptomatology), and student perceptions of their transition experience. Research limitations include the focus on American, metropolitan schools undergoing the elementary to middle school transition, and the utilisation of quantitative methodologies. Future research needs to examine the experience of students from different countries, both metropolitan and rural, undergoing school transitions. Qualitative methodologies should also be utilised to generate issues that are relevant to students' experiences. Particularly, transition research could benefit from a qualitative exploration of the experiences of Australian students undertaking the middle to high school transition.

Author: Amiee-Jade Pereira
Supervisor: Dr Julie Ann Pooley
Submitted: August 2005

Adolescents and School Transitions: A Review of the Literature

An aspect of schooling that has been prominent in educational research is that of school transitions (Akos & Galassi, 2004a; Alspaugh, 1998; Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford, 1983; Bogat, Jones, & Jason, 1980; Cotterell, 1992; Crockett, Petersen, Graber, Schulenberg, & Ebata, 1989; Elias, Gara, & Ubriaco, 1985). School transitions are the movement of students from one school to another (Johnstone, 2001). Common school transitions include; the commencement of schooling in childhood, starting a new school as a result of family relocation, and transferring from primary to middle or high school, and from middle or high school to senior high school (Bogat et al., 1980).

School transitions have been found to have numerous effects on the psychological, social and intellectual well-being of students (Elias et al., 1985; Kagan & Neuman, 1998). Psychologically, students have been found to experience a decrease in self-esteem, sense of belonging, and the ability to cope with stressors (Alspaugh, 1998; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999). Social problems that have been associated with school transitions include those related to changes in friendships, changes in teachers, and the loss of friends as students move to different schools (Hirsch & DuBois, 1992). In regard to intellectual well-being, researchers have found that school transitions have a negative effect on students' academic performance (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999) and on academic motivation (Schumacher, 1998). It appears that these negative transition effects on student outcomes are not inevitable (Akos & Galassi, 2004a, 2004b; Barone, Aguirre-Deandreis, & Trickett, 1991; Felner, Primavera, & Cauce, 1981; Fenzel, 1989; Reyes, Gillock, Kobus, & Sanchez, 2000). As a result, transition programs that are held pre-transition and post-transition have been developed in an attempt to

minimise the negative outcomes (Bogat et al., 1980; Felner, Ginter, & Primavera, 1982; Felner et al., 1981; Hertzog & Morgan, 1998).

Transition researchers have not only measured the effects of school transitions, they have also examined students' perceptions of the transition experience (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Letrello & Miles, 2003; Yates, 1999). The personal experience of school transitions varies between individuals. Some students report anticipation for new experiences whilst others recall fear (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Yates, 1999). In many studies students' feelings have been reported as mixed; they enjoy the changes but also long for their old school (Yates, 1999). The focus in the literature on the negative experience of school transitions may be limiting our understanding of the whole transition experience.

The aim of this paper is to review school transition research and to provide suggestions for future research. The review will begin by describing the period of the lifespan known as adolescence, as high school transitions occur at a time when students are experiencing developmental change (Fenzel & Blyth, 1986; Petersen, 1988; Steinberg & Morris, 2001), requiring them to cope with multiple changes in their lives (Fenzel & Blyth, 1986; Petersen, 1988; Schumacher, 1998; Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

The cumulative affect of such changes could be particularly stressful for students (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Montemayor, 1990), therefore it is important to have an understanding of the context in which school transitions occur. The review will then provide a background and a critique of the present research on school transitions. Organisational factors which affect students' school transition experience will be discussed; including school size, structure, feeder patterns and the additive effect of multiple school transitions. The affect of school transitions on various outcomes such as

academic performance, self-esteem and psychological symptomatology will be examined as will research investigating students' perceptions of their transition experience. In conclusion the review will provide a summary of the research limitations and suggestions for future research. It appears that transition research has focused primarily on American, metropolitan schools, and students undergoing the elementary to middle school transition at approximately 11 years old (Alspaugh, 1998; Barone et al., 1991; Blyth, Simmons, & Bush, 1978; Blyth et al., 1983; Cotterell, 1992; Crockett et al., 1989; Eccles et al., 1993; Felner et al., 1981; Hirsch & DuBois, 1992; Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Reyes et al., 2000; Schiller, 1999). Furthermore, quantitative methodologies have predominantly been utilised (Alspaugh, 1998; Barone et al., 1991; Blyth et al., 1978; Blyth et al., 1983; Cotterell, 1992; Crockett et al., 1989; Eccles et al., 1993; Felner et al., 1981; Hirsch & DuBois, 1992; Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Reyes et al., 2000; Schiller, 1999), providing useful information on the effects of school transitions but not on the qualitative experience from the students' perspectives (Brown & Armstrong, 1982; Johnstone, 2001, 2002; Rowland, 2002; Yates, 1999).

Adolescence

Adolescence was first described by Hall (1904, as cited in Petersen, 1988) as the period of the lifespan from approximately 10 to 20 years old, characterised by numerous and rapid developmental changes (Hurrelmann, 1990; Petersen, 1988) physically, psychologically, cognitively and socially (Hurrelmann, 1990; Petersen, 1988; Rowland, 2002; Van Der Graaf, 2001). Puberty is universally recognised as the developmental marker of adolescence (Petersen, 1988; Rowland, 2002; Stumpers, 2002; Van Der Graaf,

2001). The child's body develops into an adult's as a result of biological and physical changes that occur during this period (Kalat, 2001; Peterson, 1996).

Piaget identified the development of formal operational thinking as the primary change in cognition during adolescence (Elkind, 1990; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). In essence, cognition is enhanced by the development of abstract thinking (Petersen, 1988; Rowland, 2002; Van Der Graaf, 2001). They begin to discuss abstract ideas such as beliefs, justice, intelligence and faith (Elkind, 1990). The individual can conceptualise their own, and other people's thoughts (Elkind, 1990). That is, they can reason about and evaluate thoughts and feelings (Elkind, 1990; Rowland, 2002). This results in increased social competence as they are more capable of understanding other people (Rowland, 2002; Stumpers, 2002; Stumpers, Breen, Pooley, Cohen, & Pike, In Press).

According to Erikson, the primary developmental task of adolescence is the development of the personal identity (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Alberts, Mbalo, & Ackermann, 2003; Erikson, 1950, 1980, 1982, 1990; Goossens & Phinney, 1996; Marcia, 1990; Wires, Barocas, & Hollenbeck, 1994; Yoder, 2000). Identity development involves the development of the 'self', or 'who I am' (Berman, Schwartz, Kurtines, & Berman, 2001; Goossens & Phinney, 1996; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). The adolescent must develop their personal beliefs, values, roles and goals (Erikson, 1990), and commit to a chosen occupation (Marcia, 1990) through a process of self-exploration (Berman et al., 2001; Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003; Erikson, 1982, 1990; Rowland, 2002; Stumpers, 2002). They must integrate their past and present experiences to develop a coherent personal identity (Rowland, 2002). If the identity crisis is not resolved, identity diffusion results (Erikson, 1990) and the adolescent is unable to determine who 'I' is (Erikson, 1968, 1990).

The developmental changes of adolescence also produce changes in the functioning of the family (Petersen, 1988). Conflict between parents and adolescents varies over the course of the developmental phase. It reflects an inverted U shape (Montemayor, 1990), increasing over early adolescence (Montemayor, 1990; Petersen, 1988; Steinberg & Morris, 2001), stabilising during middle adolescence (Montemayor, 1990; Petersen, 1988; Steinberg & Morris, 2001) and decreasing in late adolescence (Montemayor, 1990; Petersen, 1988). Interestingly, topics of conflict are not the 'hot topics' (e.g., sex, drugs, religion and politics) (Montemayor, 1990) that become more prominent as adolescents search for their personal identity. Rather, it is the everyday, mundane issues of life (e.g., chores and curfews) that parents and adolescents dispute (Montemayor, 1990; Petersen, 1988). Most commonly, parent-adolescent conflict centres around school work, social lives, friends, home duties, disobedience, sibling rivalry and personal hygiene (Montemayor, 1990).

Finally, adolescence involves changes in the individual's social development. It is argued that adolescents' increased social competence is due to their increased cognitive abilities as they are more capable of relating to other people's thoughts and feelings (Petersen, 1988; Rowland, 2002; Steinberg & Morris, 2001; Stumpers, 2002).

Adolescents spend more time with their friends and less time with their family (Petersen, 1988; Steinberg & Morris, 2001; Stumpers, 2002). Peer relationships become more intimate, supportive and communicative (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). They disclose their thoughts and feelings on various aspects of their lives (Petersen, 1988), including puberty (Stumpers, 2002). The focus on peer relationships coincides with adolescents' need for independence; before they develop an egalitarian relationship with their parents, they have one with their peers (Stumpers, 2002).

It is often assumed that adolescents are easily influenced by their peers, and that this influence is always negative. However, peer pressure can be negative or positive (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). This pressure is usually not coercive, rather adolescents report being influenced by peers who they respect and admire (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Peer influence also depends upon the characteristics of the individual (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Finally, similarities between friends have been assumed to be a result of peer influence. In fact, adolescents report choosing friends who are similar to them (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Peer influence is not as problematic as was once thought.

Adolescent friendships occur predominantly within the school setting (Newman & Newman, 1990). Schools play an important role in the social development of adolescents (Newman & Newman, 1990; Rowland, 2002). Social skills are developed through peer, teacher, and class interactions (Newman & Newman, 1990). Schools are complex institutions so participating within the school assists students' understanding of organisational and group processes (Newman & Newman, 1990). Adolescents also learn about social status, politics and power when attending school (Newman & Newman, 1990). School teachers are role models who represent adulthood and society (Galbo, 1989; Newman & Newman, 1990) and therefore play a significant role in socialising adolescents and influencing their social attitudes (Galbo, 1989). Schools, and all they offer, are an integral partner in adolescent development.

School Transitions

Developmental changes of adolescence coincide with school transitions from primary to high school, or from primary to middle school and then to high school. During this time, students not only have to cope with changes occurring within themselves, but also changes within their school environment (Fenzel & Blyth, 1986). In

this section, research on school transitions will be reviewed. This will include factors affecting school transition experiences, how the experience impacts upon adolescents, and students' perceptions of the transition experience.

Factors Affecting Students' School Transition Experience

School transition research has focused on identifying the factors that influence students' transition experience. Organisational factors such as school size (Cotterell, 1992), structure (Alspaugh, 1998; Barone et al., 1991; Blyth et al., 1978; Blyth et al., 1983) and feeder patterns (Schiller, 1999) have been examined. The potential additive effect of multiple school transitions has also been investigated (Alspaugh, 1998; Blyth et al., 1983; Crockett et al., 1989; Felner et al., 1981).

The effect of school size on students' adjustment to high school was studied by Cotterell (1992). Students ($n = 373$) making the transition from 11 primary schools to 3 secondary schools were grouped into three different transition paths; a small to large school, a medium to medium school and a large to large school. Students completed the Locus of Control Scale for Children, wrote a brief description of their pre-transition expectations, a brief essay to describe their experience immediately after starting high school, and completed the Learning Environment Questionnaire at the end of the first term of high school. Teachers also rated students' adaptability.

Measures were collected pre-transition, immediately after starting high school and at the end of the first term. Cotterell (1992) found that students who experienced the most changes between schools (i.e., small primary to large high) were required to make the largest adjustment to settle in. Students who came from small schools reported more anxiety and less enjoyment than students who came from large schools. Also, students

from small primary schools reported more excitement and optimism pre-transition than students from larger schools.

Cotterell (1992) suggests that students who make the transition between schools of significantly different sizes find it harder to adjust to their new school. However, only a small number of schools and transition pathways were examined. He also did not examine the number of students from a feeder school who transitioned to each high school. Students from small primary schools possibly had a lower concentration of peers making the transition with them. It has been suggested that social support might be a mediator for the transition experience (Rowland, 2002), therefore further research could assess the influence of the number of students, from the same school, transitioning together.

In a larger study of 12 000 students, Schiller (1999) examined the effects of feeder patterns on students' school transition experience from middle to high school. The feeder patterns were: all the students from the middle school transitioning to the same high school, middle school graduates transitioning to two different high schools with most of the students going to one high school but some attending others, and few middle school graduates attending the same high school. Self-reported maths grades were collated in middle school and in high school. Results suggest that the presence of middle school peers in the high school affected individuals differently. Students who reported C grades or lower in middle school maths also obtained low grades in high school if a large proportion of their middle school peers went to their high school. In contrast, students who reported mostly A grades in middle school maths obtained high grades in high school if a large proportion of their middle school peers attended their high school. This suggests that feeder patterns might have confounded Cotterell's (1992)

results as students making the transition from smaller schools possibly had fewer peers transitioning with them. Schiller's study was limited by the use of self-reported grades; self-presentation bias might have led high achievers to report high grades even though they had declined. However, it does appear that school size and feeder patterns require further investigation.

School structure is another factor that has been investigated in the school transition literature (Alspaugh, 1998; Barone et al., 1991; Blyth et al., 1978; Blyth et al., 1983). Students attending elementary schools, middle schools and junior high schools make the transition at different ages, and might experience the transition differently. Blyth et al. (1978) compared the effects of the transition into year 7 for students attending a kindergarten to year 6 school (K-6) and a kindergarten to year 8 school (K-8). The final sample included 239 students who were attending eight K-6 schools and six K-8 schools. Structured interviews were held in the fall of year 7 and discussed students' self-image, perceptions of others' expectations, importance of different personal characteristics and attitudes towards school. The K-6 students reported experiencing a transition into year 7 whilst the K-8 students did not. K-6 students experienced more victimization and reported a lower self-esteem. It appears then that it is not the age or the school grade that is important rather it is the move to a new school. The study was limited by the use of highly structured interviews that did not allow students to elaborate on their responses. In addition, the transition experience might be different for older adolescents transitioning from middle and high schools.

A longitudinal study by Blyth et al. (1983) compared the traditional elementary (K-8) to high school (9-12) transition with the elementary to middle and then high school transition. Students were recruited in the 6th grade ($n = 594$) from six K-8

schools and eight middle schools. They participated in structured interviews in grade 6, 7, 9 and 10. Measures also included self-esteem, GPA, standardised achievement tests, self-reported extracurricular activities and perceptions of the school environment.

Results found greater reductions in self esteem, GPA and extracurricular participation for middle school students compared to high school students over the course of the study. There was also a gender difference with middle school girls reporting a greater decline than middle school boys. The authors suggest that the timing of school transitions is important, and that the middle schooling structure is detrimental to students. Unfortunately measures were not collected in the eighth grade which was when the students attending the traditional elementary school were preparing for their high school transition. These students might have experienced stressors during that time.

In a similar investigation of school transitions, Alspaugh (1998) reported that adolescents from three school districts of varying school structures were affected differently. In district one, students made the traditional elementary to high school transition, in the second district they made the elementary-middle-high school transition and in the third school district students transitioned from multiple elementary schools to one middle and then one high school. Measures were collected pre and post-transition on the MMAT (reading, maths, science and social studies marks). District two and three students who made the transition into middle school demonstrated an achievement loss in the 6th grade whilst district one non-transitioning students experienced an achievement gain. All three districts were transitioning into senior high school for 9th grade, and all experienced an achievement loss. District three demonstrated the greatest achievement loss over both transitions. In addition, district one had a significantly lower

high school drop-out rate than the other two districts, who were no different to each other.

Therefore it is argued that the traditional elementary-high school structure was best for students as it resulted in the lowest negative outcomes (Alspaugh, 1998). This supports Blyth et al.'s (1983) findings that the traditional elementary-high school structure was less harmful to adolescents than the elementary-middle-high school structure. Alspaugh's sample was biased by students' socioeconomic status, however the findings suggest that school structure effects students' school transition experience.

The multiple transitions that are experienced by students who undertake elementary-middle-high school structure have also been investigated (Alspaugh, 1998; Blyth et al., 1983; Crockett et al., 1989; Felner et al., 1981). Alspaugh (1998) and Blyth et al.'s (1983) studies outlined above support the notion of a 'double jeopardy'. Double jeopardy refers to the additive effect of multiple school transitions on students' school experiences (Alspaugh, 1998; Blyth et al., 1983; Crockett et al., 1989; Felner et al., 1981). The negative affects of school transitions appear to be greater for students who undertake multiple transitions (Alspaugh, 1998; Blyth et al., 1983; Crockett et al., 1989; Felner et al., 1981).

Felner et al. (1981) investigated the double jeopardy for 250 students who had completed at least grade 9 and were attending three public high schools in America. Students' GPA, attendance and the number of times a year they had moved were recorded. GPA was related to the number of school transfers, however this was mediated by gender and race. Females were at greater risk of school failure than males, and African American and Hispanic students were at greater risk than White students. The authors concluded that school transitions are more detrimental when they involve a

double jeopardy. The study was limited by a predominantly African American sample, and by the use of quantitative measures. Measuring GPA is only one aspect of the school transition experience; other outcomes might not be affected in the same way.

Another study also explored the effect of the timing and number of transitions on students' school experience (Crockett et al., 1989). They grouped 253 middle school students into three groups; those making an 'early single' transition into middle school at the 6th grade, those making two transitions (from 5th to 6th grade and then from 6th to 7th grade) and those making a 'late single' transition into middle school at the 7th grade. Measures were collected during the fall and spring of each school year and included end of year subject grades, a self-image questionnaire, IQ and father's occupational prestige. A double jeopardy was found; students who undertook two transitions demonstrated lower grades than students making the single transition. The negative effect on their academic performance persisted over time. Self-image was not affected, suggesting that the effect of school transitions on outcomes other than academic performance must also be investigated. There were a number of limitations with this study; namely a White, suburban middle class sample, small group sizes for the early single and the double transition groups, and the use of quantitative measures. However, it appears that the double jeopardy is a factor that affects the outcome of school transitions.

The studies outlined above investigated various factors that affect the outcomes of school transitions. It appears that students undergoing the transition between schools of significantly different size are at greater risk of negative outcomes than students transitioning between two schools of similar size (Cotterell, 1992). The number of students from the same school transitioning to the same neighbouring school also affects students' transition experience, however it seems the effect on students is more

differential (Schiller, 1999). Students who achieve higher grades also excel in their new school if a large proportion of their peers transition with them, whilst their lower achieving peers' performances are enhanced if they transition to a school with fewer of their old school peers (Schiller, 1999). It has also been consistently reported that the middle school structure is problematic for students' (Alspaugh, 1998; Blyth et al., 1983). Students who undertake the traditional elementary-high school transition demonstrate better outcomes than students who undertake the elementary-middle-high school transition (Alspaugh, 1998; Blyth et al., 1983). This finding may be confounded by the double jeopardy that middle school students experience; multiple transitions place students at greater risk of negative outcomes than fewer transitions (Alspaugh, 1998; Blyth et al., 1983; Crockett et al., 1989; Felner et al., 1981). It seems that school organization is an important factor that affects students' transition experience.

The Effect of School Transitions on Student Outcomes

Another aspect of school transitions that has been the focus of research is the effects of the transition on student outcomes. Educational outcomes such as academic achievement and motivation are emphasised by schools (Bronfenbrenner, 1990; Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004; Hahn, 1990; Rowland, 2002; Stumpers, 2002), and are therefore often thought to be the outcomes that matter the most. Academic achievement and motivation have been shown to decline over the school transition experience (Alspaugh, 1998; Barone et al., 1991; Crockett et al., 1989; Eccles et al., 1993; Felner et al., 1981; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Ratelle, Guay, Larose, & Senecal, 2004; Reyes et al., 2000). Characteristics of the individual (psychosocial adjustment, self-esteem, identity and psychological symptomatology) have also been examined (Akos & Galassi, 2004a; Alspaugh, 1998; Barone et al., 1991; Crockett et al.,

1989; Eccles et al., 1993; Felner et al., 1981; Hirsch & DuBois, 1992; Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Kinney, 1993; Reyes et al., 2000). A number of studies assessing academic achievement and individual characteristics are outlined below.

Academic achievement appears to decrease during school transitions. Alspaugh's (1998), Felner et al.'s (1981) and Crockett et al.'s (1989) studies (outlined previously) all reported declines in students' MMAT scores, GPA, and end of year grades for students making middle and high school transitions. These findings have been supported by other researchers (Alspaugh, 1998; Barone et al., 1991; Crockett et al., 1989; Felner et al., 1981; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Ratelle et al., 2004; Reyes et al., 2000).

Barone et al. (1991) investigated the middle to high school transition for 82 students. Students attended three middle schools in 8th grade and transitioned to three different high schools for 9th grade. All students experienced a decline in their GPA over the course of the transition. This effect was greater for males than for females, however females' GPA was higher both pre and post-transition which might have confounded the results. Barone et al. suggested that females might have less difficulty adjusting to the new school, but all students experienced negative consequences on their academic performance. These findings were similar to those of Isakson and Jarvis (1999) who investigated the 8th to 9th grade transition for 42 students attending a university affiliated school. GPA was recorded in May of the 8th grade, December of the 9th grade and in May of the 9th grade. Students' GPA was significantly higher in the 8th grade than in December or May of the 9th grade. GPA did not change over 9th grade suggesting that GPA is affected immediately following the transition but does not continue to decline. Isakson and Jarvis concluded that it is normative for academic performance to suffer over the middle to high school transition. As with Barone et al.'s

(1991) study, this study examined the association between GPA and school transitions and can not infer causality. Also, Isakson and Jarvis' sample consisted of laboratory school students and might not represent the general student population. However, it does appear that academic achievement may be negatively affected by the transition experience.

Individual characteristics that have been assessed include self-esteem (Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987) and psychological symptomatology (Hirsch & DuBois, 1992; Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987). Hirsch and Rapkin (1987) evaluated the affect of the elementary-junior high transition on students' self-esteem and psychological symptomatology. The sample consisted of 159 students transitioning from six elementary schools to one junior high school. Students completed self-report questionnaires examining self-esteem and psychological symptomatology at the end of the 6th grade, middle of the 7th grade and the end of the 7th grade. Academic performance was obtained from the school records.

There was no change in students' self-esteem from the 6th to the 7th grade. Indeed, self-esteem was found to increase over the course of the 7th grade. Students with higher grades reported higher scores on the self-esteem scale than students with lower grades. In terms of psychological symptomatology, there was an increase in somatization, but a decrease in phobic anxiety from elementary to junior high school. Females reported an increase in obsessive compulsive symptoms, depression, hostility and psychoticism whilst males reported a decrease. Hirsch and Rapkin (1987) concluded that females were more vulnerable to the effects of the transition than males. They also suggested that the reductions in phobic symptoms might represent a reduction in transition apprehension, but that the increase in somatic symptoms might be an

expression of transition stress. It appears that Hirsch and Rapkin's (1987) findings were inconclusive.

Another study, conducted by Hirsch and Dubois (1992), investigated the effect of school transitions on the psychological symptomatology of students making the elementary-junior high school transition. The final sample of students making the transition from six elementary schools to one junior high school consisted of 143 adolescents. Self-report questionnaires were administered at the end of 6th grade, middle of the 7th grade, end of the 7th grade and the end of the 8th grade. Measures utilised were a peer support scale and a psychological symptomatology scale. Peer social support was found to be a significant predictor of psychological symptomatology over the immediate transition experience. That is, students who reported more symptoms also reported fewer friends. In addition, psychological symptomatology was higher at the end of year 6 than any other time of measurement. The results of both studies (Hirsch & DuBois, 1992; Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987) were limited by the use of self-report measures and small samples that might not reflect the general population. Further to this, causal inferences were not possible as the studies (Hirsch & DuBois, 1992; Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987) investigated associations between variables. However, it does appear that the school transition experience requires further research to consider the effects on student outcomes.

School transition researchers have consistently reported a negative impact of school transitions on academic performance (Alspaugh, 1998; Barone et al., 1991; Crockett et al., 1989; Felner et al., 1981; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Ratelle et al., 2004; Reyes et al., 2000). However, the affect of school transitions on other outcomes is uncertain. Students' self-image reportedly does not change over school transitions

(Crockett et al., 1989), whilst self-esteem has been shown to decline in some studies (Blyth et al., 1983) and to remain unchanged in others (Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987). Further to this, the effect of school transitions on psychological symptomatology are inconclusive (Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987), although there does appear to be an increase in symptoms (Hirsch & DuBois, 1992). Further research is required to investigate the effect of school transitions on outcomes other than academic performance.

Students' Perceptions of Their School Transition Experience

Another aspect of school transitions that has been explored is students' perceptions of their transition experience. As research has most commonly utilised quantitative methods (Akos & Galassi, 2004a, 2004b; Berndt, Miller, & Park, 1989; Feldlaufer, Midgley, & Eccles, 1988; Fenzel, 1989; Harter, Whitesell, & Kowalski, 1992; Lord, Eccles, & McCarthy, 1994; McDonald, 1992; Mitman & Packer, 1982) the need for qualitative research, which enables students to have a voice, has been recognised (Brown & Armstrong, 1982; Johnstone, 2001, 2002; Kinney, 1993; Letrello & Miles, 2003; Rowland, 2002; Stumpers, 2002; Yates, 1999). Much of the quantitative research reported negative consequences of students' transition experience (Akos & Galassi, 2004a, 2004b; Alspaugh, 1998; Barone et al., 1991; Crockett et al., 1989; Eccles et al., 1993; Felner et al., 1981; Hirsch & DuBois, 1992; Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Reyes et al., 2000). However, the meaning and perception of the transition experience from the students' perspective require qualitative methods that allow students to 'tell it like it is' for them. Such research has uncovered both positive and negative aspects of school transitions according to the students undergoing the changes.

The primary (year 6) to high (year 7) school transition of Australian students was examined by Yates (1999). Over 100 students transitioning to four different secondary schools participated in focus groups. Interviews were 25 to 50 minutes long and were conducted in years 6 and 7. Students reported mixed feelings; anticipation and excitement for high school and grief for their primary school days. They were excited about making new friends and attending new classes that they could choose. Yates' study provided insight into students' thoughts and feelings regarding the upcoming transition to high school. The study was limited by the use of focus groups; students might not have been as honest and open due to the presence of their peers.

However, Johnstone (2001, 2002) reported similar findings with Australian students undergoing the same transition. In the 2001 study, 10 students participated in individual interviews and completed two open-ended questionnaires at the end of year 6. Follow-up interviews were conducted in the first three terms of year 7 along with questionnaires and journal entries. Responses were content analysed and uncovered three themes; adaptation to organisational culture, adaptation to social culture, and personal reactions and adaptations. Organisational culture included concerns about the school size, layout and structure, as well as teacher-related concerns. Adaptation to social culture referred to concerns and experiences of changing and developing new friendships, and coping with bullying. Personal reactions and adaptations described the fear and anticipation that Yates (1999) found. Johnstone's (2001) study overcame Yates' (1999) focus group limitation through individual interviews and uncovered the same results.

In the second study (Johnstone, 2002), the primary (year 6) to high (year 7) school transition was explored with 13 students located in rural Australia. Students

participated in semi-structured interviews and kept journals over the transition period from the end of year 6 to the end of year 7. Constant-comparative analysis revealed the same three themes of the (2001) study. Students reported mixed emotions, and various concerns related to school organisation and social experiences. Further, the school transition was a highly individual experience. There were diverse concerns and individual differences in the salience of the concerns.

The three Australian studies reviewed (Johnstone, 2001, 2002; Yates, 1999) suggest that quantitative measures of outcomes are only one perspective of the school transition experience. Students' discussions of their experiences through focus groups and interviews suggest that there are other aspects of the transitions that warrant further research. Unfortunately, the qualitative studies examined the perspectives of younger adolescents (12 years old); future research could include older adolescents to assess their experiences.

Limitations and Future Research

The literature reviewed in this paper highlights a number of limitations in the school transition research. The research is predominantly American and might not be relevant to the school transition experience of students in other parts of the world.

Research, therefore, needs to be conducted in other countries to examine the school transition experience relative to different countries' education systems. Future research could investigate school transitions for Australian students, who have traditionally undergone a pre-primary (5 y.o.) to primary (6 y.o. to 12 y.o.), and primary to secondary (13 y.o. to 17 y.o.) school transition.

Much of the transition research has been conducted utilising metropolitan samples making the transition from elementary to middle or high school. There are few

studies that have examined the transition experiences of rural students. It is likely that rural students' experiences are very different; they might have other issues that are of more concern to them such as boarding or travelling to attend high school. It is also possible that the transition from elementary school is different to the transition from middle school to senior high school. In Australia, there is a move towards middle schooling as an age-appropriate educational context for young adolescents (Barratt, 1998). However, a search of the literature failed to yield any research on the middle-high school transition within Australian settings. Further, experiences might differ due to age and developmental stage. Therefore future research should examine the school transition experience of rural students, and students making the middle-senior high school transition.

Finally, transition research methods have been primarily quantitative. Emphasis on the educational outcomes (e.g., academic achievement) (Beck & Malley, 1998) of schooling has lead researchers to focus on the effects of the transitions on these outcomes. However, the qualitative research that has explored students' transition perceptions suggests that there is more to the transition experience than the negative outcomes that have been uncovered via quantitative research (Johnstone, 2001, 2002; Letrello & Miles, 2003; Yates, 1999). Qualitative research that investigates the issues related to the transition experience, from the views of those experiencing them, might provide insight into issues not yet recognised. Although qualitative methods have been criticised for being subjective, students' perceptions are subjective and would therefore be suited to qualitative designs (Rowland, 2002). Transition programs that are based on issues related to the transition might benefit students better.

In conclusion, educational research has examined school transitions for many years. Research has investigated the factors that affect school transition experiences such as school size (Cotterell, 1992; Schiller, 1999), structure (Alspaugh, 1998; Barone et al., 1991; Blyth et al., 1978; Blyth et al., 1983), and multiple school transitions (Alspaugh, 1998; Blyth et al., 1983; Crockett et al., 1989; Felner et al., 1981). Transition research has also explored the effects of school transitions on student outcomes (Akos & Galassi, 2004a; Alspaugh, 1998; Barone et al., 1991; Crockett et al., 1989; Eccles et al., 1993; Felner et al., 1981; Hirsch & DuBois, 1992; Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Kinney, 1993; Ratelle et al., 2004; Reyes et al., 2000) and more recently, students' perceptions of school transitions (Berndt & Miller, 1990; Feldlaufer et al., 1988; Fenzel, 1989; Harter et al., 1992; Johnstone, 2001, 2002; Kinney, 1993; Letrello & Miles, 2003; Lord et al., 1994; McDonald, 1992; Mitman & Packer, 1982; Rowland, 2002; Stumpers, 2002; Yates, 1999).

However, transition research has focused on the quantitative experience of the elementary-middle school transition for American, metropolitan students (Alspaugh, 1998; Barone et al., 1991; Blyth et al., 1978; Blyth et al., 1983; Cotterell, 1992; Crockett et al., 1989; Eccles et al., 1993; Felner et al., 1981; Hirsch & DuBois, 1992; Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Reyes et al., 2000; Schiller, 1999). Transition research could benefit from exploring the experience of Australian students in their transition from middle to high school. In order not to pre-empt the issues that pervade the current literature, the use of qualitative methods would serve as a way of generating the domain of issues relevant to the Australian experience.

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Running head: RURAL STUDENTS SCHOOL TRANSITION

A Qualitative Exploration of the Transition Experience of Students From a High School
to A Senior High School in Rural Western Australia

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A report submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the
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Faculty of Community Studies, Education and Social Sciences,
Edith Cowan University

October 2005

Declaration

I declare that this written assignment is my own work and does not include:

(i) material from published sources used without proper acknowledgement;

or

(ii) material copied from the work of other students.

Signature

_____ (Amiee-Jade Pereira)

Abstract

This study explored the experience of rural students who had undergone transitions between schools to continue their studies in year 11 and 12. A thematic content analysis identified two main themes; social relationships and school issues. Social relationships, concerned with peer interactions and student-teacher relationships, had long-term significance while school issues, particularly academia and school structure, were considered a short term concern. The study recommends increased attention to the development of peer and teacher relationships, informing students of the academic focus of year 11 and 12, and maintaining the schools' current pre-transition preparation that introduces the students to the new school environment.

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A Qualitative Exploration of the Transition Experience of Students from A High School
to a Senior High School in Rural Western Australia

An aspect of schooling that has been prominent in educational research is that of school transitions (Akos & Galassi, 2004a; Alspaugh, 1998; Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford, 1983; Bogat, Jones, & Jason, 1980; Cotterell, 1992; Crockett, Petersen, Graber, Schulenberg, & Ebata, 1989; Elias, Gara, & Ubriaco, 1985). School transitions are the movement of students from one school to another (Johnstone, 2001). Common school transitions include; the commencement of schooling in childhood, starting a new school as a result of family relocation, and transferring from primary to middle or high school, or from middle or high school to senior high school (Bogat et al., 1980).

School transitions have been found to have numerous effects on the psychological, social and intellectual well-being of students (Elias et al., 1985; Kagan & Neuman, 1998). Psychologically, students have been found to experience a decrease in self-esteem, sense of belonging, and the ability to cope with stressors (Alspaugh, 1998; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999). Social problems that have been associated with school transitions have included changes in peer friendships, changes in teachers, and the loss of friends as students move to different schools (Hirsch & DuBois, 1992). In regard to intellectual well-being, researchers have found that school transitions have a negative effect on students' academic performance (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999) and on academic motivation (Schumacher, 1998). However, it appears that these negative transition effects on student outcomes are not inevitable (Akos & Galassi, 2004a, 2004b; Barone, Aguirre-Deandreis, & Trickett, 1991; Felner, Primavera, & Cauce, 1981; Fenzel, 1989; Reyes, Gillock, Kobus, & Sanchez, 2000). As a result, transition programs have been developed in an attempt to minimise the negative

outcomes (Bogat et al., 1980; Felner, Ginter, & Primavera, 1982; Felner et al., 1981; Hertzog & Morgan, 1998; Mizelle, 2005).

Further to this, transition researchers have not only measured the effects of school transitions, they have examined students' perceptions of the transition experience (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Letrello & Miles, 2003; Yates, 1999). As research has most commonly utilised quantitative methods (Akos & Galassi, 2004a, 2004b; Berndt, Miller, & Park, 1989; Feldlaufer, Midgley, & Eccles, 1988; Fenzel, 1989; Harter, Whitesell, & Kowalski, 1992; Lord, Eccles, & McCarthy, 1994; McDonald, 1992; Mitman & Packer, 1982) the need for qualitative research, which enables students to have a voice, has been recognised (Brown & Armstrong, 1982; Johnstone, 2001, 2002; Kinney, 1993; Letrello & Miles, 2003; Rowland, 2002; Stumpers, 2002; Yates, 1999). The meaning and perception of the transition experience from the students' perspective requires qualitative methods that allow students to 'tell it like it is' for them. As quantitative research, by its very design, tunnels participant responses towards particular concerns, results may not reflect the true experiences as expressed by participants. This may in part explain the predominance of negative consequences reported in the school transition literature (Akos & Galassi, 2004a, 2004b; Alspaugh, 1998; Barone et al., 1991; Crockett et al., 1989; Eccles, Wigfield et al., 1993; Felner et al., 1981; Hirsch & DuBois, 1992; Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Reyes et al., 2000). However, research utilizing qualitative methodologies has uncovered both positive and negative aspects of school transitions.

For example, an American study by Letrello and Miles (2003) adopted a qualitative approach, and used interviews to compare the perceptions of students with and without learning disabilities who were making a transition from middle to high

school. Student perceptions resulted in the identification of two emerging themes that appeared to be important in the transition process; social interaction (with friends and new students) and activity involvement (participating in extracurricular activities). These themes represented the aspects of the transition that were most important to them.

Students described the social interactions between their friends and new peers as a positive aspect of the school transition, whilst they found it difficult adjusting to the new school lay-out, teachers' expectations and time planning homework and peer interactions. Letrello and Miles concluded that schools should hold activities that encourage social interaction between incoming students and students who are already in attendance at the school.

Similar studies by Akos and Galassi (2004b) and Yates (1999) also examined student perceptions of the transition experience. Akos and Galassi (2004b) utilised both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine American student, parent and teacher perceptions of the transitions from both elementary to middle and middle to high school. Students reported both positive and negative perceptions of their transitions which contrasts with the negative effects reported in other literature. Akos and Galassi's findings were replicated by Yates (1999), who found Australian students to be ambivalent in regard to their transition experience. Qualitative data was obtained through the use of focus groups involving over 100 students making the transition from three primary schools (year 6) to four secondary schools (year 7). Individual interviews were carried out with students in year 6 and 7 for approximately 25 to 50 minutes. Students reported mixed feelings; anticipation and excitement for high school and grief and loss for their primary school experience. Students were excited about making new friends and attending classes that they could choose. Yates' study provided insight into

students' thoughts and feelings regarding the upcoming transition to high school. The study was limited by the use of focus groups; the presence of their peers might have influenced the students' responses.

Similar findings were reported by Johnstone (2001) with Australian students undergoing the same transition. Ten students participated in individual interviews and completed two open-ended questionnaires at the end of year 6 with follow-up interviews conducted in the first three terms of year 7 along with questionnaires and journal entries. Responses were content analysed and three themes were identified; adaptation to organisational culture, adaptation to social culture, and personal reactions and adaptations. Organisational culture included concerns about the school size, layout and structure, as well as teacher-related concerns. Adaptation to social culture referred to concerns and experiences of changing and developing new friendships, and coping with bullying. Personal reactions and adaptations described the fear and anticipation that Yates (1999) found. Therefore, methodological triangulation (Janesick, 1994) through Johnstone's (2001) and Yates' (1999) studies uncovered the same results providing further support for the findings that students' feelings are mixed regarding their school transition experience.

In her second study in Australia, Johnstone (2002) examined the primary (year 6) to high (year 7) school transition with 13 students in a rural location. Students participated in semi-structured interviews and kept journals over the 12 month transition period. Constant-comparative analysis revealed the same three themes of the (2001) study, these being adaptation to organisational culture, adaptation to social culture, and personal reactions and adaptations. Students reported mixed emotions, and various concerns related to school organisation and social experiences. Further, the school

transition was a highly individual experience. There were diverse concerns and individual differences in the salience of the concerns. The use of different methodologies, qualitative and quantitative, has resulted in a broader understanding of the transition issues in traditional educational models from primary to high school. However, little research has examined the issues relevant to those students transitioning at other ages i.e., middle to senior high school. Future research could include older adolescents to assess their school transition experiences.

There are a number of other limitations that permeate school transition research. First, the research is predominantly American and might not be relevant to the school transition experience of students in other education systems (Johnstone, 2001, 2002). Therefore, future research could investigate school transitions for Australian students, who have traditionally undergone a pre-primary (5 y.o.) to primary (6 y.o. to 12 y.o.), and primary to secondary (13 y.o. to 17 y.o.) transitions. Second, much of the transition research has been conducted utilising metropolitan samples making the transition from elementary to middle or high school. There are few studies that have examined the transition experiences of rural students which may provide different issues of relevance or importance (e.g., boarding, travel) (Johnstone, 2001, 2002). Finally, it is possible that the transition from elementary school is different to the transition from middle school to senior high school and may warrant investigation. In Western Australia, there is a move towards middle schooling as an age-appropriate educational context for young adolescents (Barratt, 1998). However, a search of the literature failed to yield any research on the middle to high school transition within Australian settings. Future research should explore the school transition experience of rural students, and students

making the middle-senior high school transition as their experiences might be quite different to the experiences of younger, metropolitan adolescents.

In order to understand the issues relevant to the transition of rural students, a qualitative methodology was used. This enabled the investigation of the issues related to the transition experience from the views of those experiencing it. Therefore the aim of this study was to explore students' perceptions of their transition experience from a high school (years 8 to 10) to a senior high school (years 8 to 12) in rural Western Australia.

Method

Paradigms and Assumptions

A social constructionist perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 2003) was adopted in order to explore the student's perceived transition experience. This perspective assumes there are multiple realities, with an individual's reality defined by their experience and therefore influenced by their personal history, the context they are in, and their biases and assumptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 2003; Polkinghorne, 1992; Schwandt, 2000; Smith, 1995). Adopting this approach enabled salient issues from the students' perspectives to emerge.

Participants

The sample consisted of 10 rural students who had made the transition from a high school (HS) (year 8 to 10) to a senior high school (SHS) (year 8 to 12) in a neighbouring town in the south west of Western Australia. Miles and Hubermann (1994) suggest a sample size of 10 to 12 participants is sufficient to reach saturation. There were four year 11 students (3 girls and 1 boy) and six year 12 students (4 girls and 2

boys). Of the 10 participants, seven were studying Tertiary Entrance Exam (TEE) subjects and three were in the Non-TEE stream (one year 11 and the other two year 12).

The schools were situated in towns located one hour from a major regional centre and approximately four hours from Perth. The towns were approximately 35 kilometres apart. The two schools were of considerably different sizes (see Table 1).

Table 1

Comparison of the High School and the Senior High School Populations

		<u>Cohort</u>	
		2004	2005
<hr/>			
Total School Population			
High School	155		174
Senior High School	680		682
<hr/>			
Senior High School's Year 11 Population			
Total No. of Year 11's	165		170
Transitioned from the High School	27		31
<hr/>			
Total Number of Teachers			
High School	12.54		13.2
Senior High School	58		58
<hr/>			

Permission was sought from the Principal, the parents and the students through the SHS. Participants were initially recruited through the school's year 11 group and then through a snowballing technique, by which members of the local population

introduced the researcher to students who were interested in participating in the study (Fife-Schaw, 1995; Lyons, 2000).

Data Collection Procedures

Interviews were held with each participant at a convenient time and location. The interviews were facilitated by an interview schedule (Smith, 1995) (see Appendix A). The interview schedule, adapted from those in the studies by Akos and Galassi (2004), Letrello and Miles (2003) and Yates (1999), began with general questions such as “Tell me about the HS” to more specific questions such as “What were your expectations about going to (the SHS)?”, “What did you do to feel comfortable at (the SHS)?” and “Tell me what is different about the SHS and the HS”. This funneling technique (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1995) was adopted to ensure the interview progressed smoothly and to build a rapport with the participant (Minichiello et al., 1995; Smith, 1995). Participants completed a demographics sheet (see Appendix B) before the interview. Interviews were tape-recorded using a hand-held tape recorder.

Ethics

In keeping with the university’s ethical guidelines, informed consent was obtained from both the student and their parent or legal guardian (see Appendixes C, D, E, and F). The information letter explained that the students’ participation was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. It also explained that their participation was confidential and that all data would be de-identified to maintain confidentiality. It also stated that the de-identified results and the written report would be made available to the school at the end of the year, and that upon completion of the thesis, all data (tape-recordings and transcripts) would be held for 7 years in a secure environment at the university.

Data Analysis

The tape-recordings were transcribed verbatim. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the transcripts. Thematic content analysis involves examining the data in search of common themes that answer the research question (Millward, 2000; Minichiello et al., 1995; Van Manen, 1990). The analysis process began by initially reading through the first participant's transcript and recording any thoughts that came to mind on the left hand column of the page. Next, key words, concepts or sentences that describe the student's perceptions of their transition experience were underlined (Minichiello et al., 1995). The above steps were conducted twice to enable the researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of the participant's experiences. Case summaries of each section of the interview were then written using the key words and phrases identified whilst reading the transcripts (Minichiello et al., 1995). Responses were then coded by writing the key words and phrases onto cards (Miles & Hubermann, 1994; Minichiello et al., 1995). Finally, themes that helped to describe the student's perceived transition experience were identified by combining common codes (Miles & Hubermann, 1994; Minichiello et al., 1995).

After analyzing the first participant's interview, constant comparative analysis was used to develop overall themes that describe the sample's transition experience. Constant comparative analysis involves comparing the other transcripts to the first one, and using the themes identified from the first transcript to begin analysing the rest (Janesick, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). This was a reflexive process, with the researcher moving between the first few transcripts and the later ones in order to develop a complete understanding of all of the participants' transition experience (Lincoln & Guba, 2003; Marcus, 1994). Therefore upon completion of the thematic content analysis,

themes were identified that described the student's transition experience. This process of reflexivity brought me closer to the data by highlighting the biases that influence my interpretations of it (Breakwell, Hammond, & Fife-Schaw, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 2003; Marcus, 1994; Oleson, 1994). Finally, investigator triangulation (Janesick, 1994) through peer-checking of the themes occurred to maintain the credibility of the findings (Denzin, 1994; Greene, 1994; Huberman & Miles, 1994; Janesick, 1994). The rigor (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994) of the study was therefore ensured through: the adequacy and appropriateness of the data collected which enabled saturation to occur (Morse, 1994); documentation of the study through an audit trail (Morse, 1994); audio-recordings of the interviews (Adler & Adler, 1994); reflexive analysis of the interviews (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 2003; Marcus, 1994); and investigator triangulation (Morse, 1994).

Findings and Interpretations

Two major themes emerged from the analysis of the school transition experience; *social relationships* and *school issues*. Social relationships refers to the relationships between peers and those between students and teachers within the school. School issues identifies aspects of the school that were focused on the academic experience and the structure and organization of the school.

Social Relationships

Social relationships appear to have dominated the students' school transition experience. Social relationships refers to the social relationships that occurred within the school context and consists of two sub-themes; peer relationships and teacher-student

relationships. All of the students' transition experiences were predominantly surrounded by adjustment issues that were focused upon negotiating these new relationships within the new school. Social relationships was the central transition theme for all students, and the only difficulty reported by the non-TEE students. It is important to note that negotiating social relationships with peers and teachers was a long-term adjustment issue; students in year 12 continued to focus on the issues surrounding the social relationships in their new school.

Peer Relationships

Peer relationships refers to the social relationships between students in the SHS. In particular, the students' discussed the issues surrounding developing relationships with their new peers. The peer relationships between the HS students and the new peers were characterized by segregation. This occurred at two levels: an inter-town level; and an academic level. Inter-town segregation describes the separation of students from different towns into distinct social groups within the SHS. Academic segregation identifies the divide between students who were undertaking different academic pathways (TEE vs. non-TEE) in year 11 and 12.

Inter-town segregation was consistently discussed by students regardless of their academic year (11 or 12) or academic status (TEE or non-TEE). The year 11 and 12 cohorts included student groups from various surrounding towns. Peer relationships within the year groups were split according to the students' hometown and created a rift between peers, "...a lot of people still don't (talk), it's very segregated, like us and them still...a lot of them are (the SHS) students.". The hometown segregation was associated with prejudices against students who were from a different town, "*All the (HS) girls thought the (SHS) girls were sluts...*" Further to this, the HS students had a perception

that they had more trouble fitting in than students transitioning from other towns, "*I think the (other town) kids have fitted in quite well.*" and "*I think it's the (HS students) against everyone else.*" The inter-town segregation might have been a factor in preventing the social interaction between students within the SHS.

Students were also segregated according to their subject selection for year 11 and 12. In Western Australia, university bound students choose to undertake Tertiary Entrance Examination subjects (e.g., English, Chemistry, Geography) throughout year 11 and 12. Students who are vocationally focused complete non-TEE subjects. This means that TEE and non-TEE students actually participate in different classes according to their subject selection. Non-TEE students described the lack of social interaction between themselves and their TEE peers as being due to the differences in their class choices. This academic segregation appeared to compound the inter-town segregation and enhanced the social isolation of the HS students undertaking the non-TEE subjects, "... 'cause I'm doing non-TEE most of the (SHS) girls are doing TEE and so, I don't associate with them at all." Another non-TEE student commented on the academic segregation in terms of the social day held at the start of year 11, "*We got to meet TEE people who do non-TEE and non-TEE people who do TEE because all the TEE people knew each other and all the non-TEE don't.*" It appears that for this student, the social day provided an opportunity to meet TEE peers who she would otherwise have not met. Interestingly, the TEE students did not discuss an academic segregation and therefore appeared to be unaware of this as an issue. However, from the perspectives of the non-TEE participants, it appears that the academic pathways of students might be a factor in the difficulties of peer relationships between the HS students and their new peers.

The segregation within the peer relationships at the SHS was amplified because of the rural setting. Social interaction was inhibited by the geographical location of the towns they resided in (Johnstone, 2001). Whereas children in metropolitan areas often live in close vicinity of their friends and might even develop friendships with children who live in the same location but attend different schools, rural students are limited to the children who live in the same town and attend the same schools. The HS students transitioned to a school that was located in a town approximately 35 kilometers from their own. If students from the surrounding towns become friends, they had to find a way to travel to see each other. As one student pointed out, the physical distance between the towns prevented inter-town peer interaction,

It's a bit hard because of the distance between the 2 towns but I know some of the guys come down and play hockey in (SHS's town) and I see them there and you know, have a chat and watch them play. And that's it, but other than that not really because of the travelling, like the distance.

The public transport system in rural areas does not run as regularly as in the metropolitan areas, so the students could only visit inter-town peers if another person drove them. Further to this, the legal age for obtaining a driver's license in Western Australia is 17, so most of the students were too young to drive themselves whilst they were attending the SHS for year 11 and 12, again making social visits difficult.

Another factor affecting segregation would appear to be the competitiveness between rural towns. From personal experience of growing up in a rural area, inter-town rivalry was a major issue particularly as it was played out through sports such as football. This connection was made by a student in this study,

There's always been this sort of rivalry and because of the football teams and stuff as well. Like, there's this big hatred between the (HS town's) footy team and the (SHS's town's) footy team and that sort of thing. There's always been that sort of rivalry and that was really hard to conquer, when we moved there.

It would seem that the segregation began before the students even began to transition to the new school, and was difficult to 'break down' once they moved there.

Segregation in terms of peer relationships was also discussed in terms of the students' academic pathways. It appears that the academic pathways compounded the inter-town segregation that students' perceived within the school. The non-TEE students associated the TEE/non-TEE divide with their lack of interaction with their new peers. For these students, they were not only prevented from social interaction with the inter-town peers outside of school, but also within school. From their perspective it seems, at least the HS's TEE students have the opportunity to meet the inter-town peers in their TEE classes.

The inter-town rivalry that underlined the peer segregation might be understood in terms of social identity theory (Tarrant, 2002). Social identity theory argues that an individual's group membership contributes to the development of aspects of their identity, particularly their social identity (Moghaddam, 1998; Schmitt, Branscombe, & Kappen, 2003; Tarrant, 2002; Tarrant, North, Edridge et al., 2001; Tarrant, North, & Hargreaves, 2001). In-groups, or groups to which the individual belongs to, are favoured whilst out-groups, or groups that the individual does not belong to, are viewed less favourably (Schmitt et al., 2003; Tarrant, 2002; Tarrant, North, Edridge et al., 2001; Tarrant, North, & Hargreaves, 2001). This inter-group discrimination (Tarrant, 2002)

enables the individual to develop and maintain a positive social identity (Tarrant, 2002; Tarrant, North, Edridge et al., 2001; Tarrant, North, & Hargreaves, 2001) and a positive self-esteem (Tarrant, North, Edridge et al., 2001; Tarrant, North, & Hargreaves, 2001).

These aspects of social identity theory have been found to be particularly apparent in adolescent peer groups (Tarrant, 2002; Tarrant, North, Edridge et al., 2001). Peer groups are increasingly important to adolescents as they strive for independence from their parents (Petersen, 1988; Steinberg & Morris, 2001; Stumpers, 2002; Tarrant, 2002). Adolescents' have rated their peer in-groups more favourably than peer out-groups on negative characteristics (e.g., unfriendly, boring) (Tarrant, 2002; Tarrant, North, & Hargreaves, 2001), positive characteristics (e.g., friendly, honest) (Tarrant, 2002; Tarrant, North, & Hargreaves, 2001), and interests and activities that the adolescents' value (Tarrant, North, Edridge et al., 2001; Tarrant, North, & Hargreaves, 2001). It has been suggested that devaluing the out-group occurs more frequently when the individual perceives their social identity to be under threat (Tarrant, 2002; Tarrant, North, Edridge et al., 2001). It may be that the HS students perceived their social identity to be under threat when they had to transition to their 'rival' town's SHS.

One way in which the inter-town segregation could be combated is through social interaction. The contact hypothesis (Moghaddam, 1998) posits that interpersonal contact will result in more positive perceptions of out-groups when close, intimate contact occurs in a co-operative, equal status context in which groups are inter-dependent and working towards a common goal (Forsyth, 1999; Fujioka, 1999; Heuer, Bengiamin, & Wessman Downey, 2001; Moghaddam, 1998). Although researchers examining the contact hypothesis have focused on inter-racial discrimination and stereotypes (Fujioka, 1999; Heuer et al., 2001) it appears that it might also assist the

development of more positive social peer relationships with the inter-town peers at the SHS. Further, research on school transitions suggests that peer relationships are not only important for adolescents' social development (Petersen, 1988; Rosenbaum & Person, 2003; Steinberg & Morris, 2001; Stumpers, 2002; Yoshida, 2001) but are also important in creating students' sense of belonging to their schools (Booker, 2004; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Letrello & Miles, 2003; Rowland, 2002). Several researchers (Johnstone, 2001, 2002; Letrello & Miles, 2003; Liu, 2003) have suggested that social interaction during school transitions might be assisted through non-academic based activities that are focused on encouraging peer interaction. Therefore, such social activities might also assist the interactions of the inter-town peers at the SHS. In previous years, the SHS had held a transition camp in the first few weeks of year 11 to assist the peer relationships in the year group. Although the camp was no longer held, the year 11 and 12 cohorts in this study attended a day trip. However, it was reported that one day was not long enough to bridge the inter-town social gap. A number of non-academic activities run over a few days or a camp might be more successful in supporting the inter-town peer relationships at the school.

Teacher-Student Relationships

The second sub-theme, teacher-student relationships, relates to the social relationships between students and teachers within the school. Perceptions of a change in the role of teachers permeated discussions of the teacher-student relationship. Students divided the teacher role into two aspects; a formal, academic role and an informal, personal role. Teacher-student relationships were characterized purely by the formal, academic role, "*They're just your teacher and that's it...they don't really know you on a personal basis*" and "*They're just your teacher, you don't talk to them, it's just*

academically based I suppose". Teachers appeared to be focused on their academic responsibility towards the students rather than on "*form(ing) a friendship*".

The formal, academic role of the SHS teachers was emphasized by students when discussing the lack of relationships they had with many teachers within the school. Many teachers were unknown to the students because they did not interact in a formal class setting. Since the teacher-student relationships were focused on the formal academic role of the teachers, a lack of a formal interaction prevented the development of any relationship with such teachers. Students described the lack of relationship with teachers who did not teach them, "*...the technology teachers, like woodwork, down that way, I'm not really involved in that area of the school so I don't really know them that much.*" Further to this, the SHS's administration staff (Deputy/Principal) were unknown to students due to the lack of formal interactions,

It took me I think probably three terms to know who was the Principal and who was the Deputy Principal...I think they are the people that you can go and see if you have any timetable problems or if you get into trouble you go to them or whatever. But they sort of don't come up and like, I think the Principal came in on transition day and on the first day and said, 'I'm the Principal' and said something like that but I'd forgotten.

Therefore, teacher-student relationships appeared to be focused on the academic goals of year 11 and 12, supporting the development of a formal, academic relationship but not an informal, personal relationship.

Transition literature consistently reports a change in teacher-student relationships following school transitions. Students' perceive the teachers at their new schools to be

less caring than their old teachers and more focused on the academic function of schools (Eccles, Midgley et al., 1993; Eccles, Wigfield et al., 1993; Feldlaufer et al., 1988; Liu, 2003; Stumpers, 2002). This appears to be associated with an increase in the academic task focus of schools as students' progress through their final years of education (Eccles, Midgley et al., 1993; Eccles, Wigfield et al., 1993; Liu, 2003; Stumpers, 2002). It is not only students who have perceived the increased academic task focus of schools and in particular the teacher-students relationship, but also trained observers of the classroom (Eccles, Wigfield et al., 1993; Feldlaufer et al., 1988).

Adolescents' perceptions of their teachers are important as teachers are often significant adults in their students' lives (Galbo, 1989; Rogerson, 2004). As adults that adolescents spend a substantial part of their days with, teachers play a central role in adolescent development (Galbo, 1989; Rogerson, 2004). Further, their relationship with students' affects the students' experience of schooling (Galbo, 1989) and, in particular, facilitates the development of students' sense of belonging to their school (Galbo, 1989; Goodenow, 1993a; Rogerson, 2004; Stumpers, 2002). Teachers who are friendly, encourage whole class participation, and treat students equally are more effective in creating a sense of belonging than other teachers (Galbo, 1989; Stumpers, 2002).

Adolescents who have a personal relationship with their teachers report a higher sense of belonging than peers who do not (Galbo, 1989; Goodenow, 1993; Osterman, 2000). The relationship is more influential if it involves deep and extensive communication, trust, and understanding (Galbo, 1989). Students who perceive their teachers to have a genuine interest in the students' lives also report a higher sense of belonging (Galbo, 1989).

Although the teachers' formal academic role is meant to assist their academic performance, it might actually be hindering it. Students' sense of belonging, associated with a more informal, personal role played by teachers, has been associated with: academic achievement (Booker, 2004; Bronfenbrenner, 1990; Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004; Goodenow, 1993b; Pretty, Conroy, Dugay, Fowler, & Williams, 1996; Rogerson, 2004; Rowland, 2002; Schaps & Solomon, 1990; Smerdon, 2002); academic motivation (Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Bronfenbrenner, 1990; Rowland, 2002; Ryan, 2001; Weiner, 1990); greater school commitment (Rowland, 2002); taking greater responsibility for academic success (Rowland, 2002; Stumpers, 2002); high school satisfaction (Rowland, 2002); lower socio-emotional distress (Rowland, 2002); and more positive teacher-student relationships (Rowland, 2002). Students who feel they belong at school are more likely to complete high school (Bronfenbrenner, 1990; Hahn, 1990) and report higher expectations for academic success (Rowland, 2002; Stumpers, 2002). In summary, it appears that the informal, personal role could support the students' academic success by assisting their transition to the new school. A balance between the formal and the informal teacher roles might also be beneficial to students' academic performance. Therefore, non-academic social interaction between students and teachers could develop teacher-student relationships through informal, personal interactions (Johnstone, 2001, 2002; Liu, 2003). The HS students could also be provided with information on what to expect at their new school; year 11 and 12 schooling is focused on the academic goal of schooling.

School Issues

The second theme, school issues, refers to aspects of the school transition that were focused on the academic function and the structural issues facing students as they

negotiated their new surroundings. The theme is divided into two sub-themes; academia and structural issues. Academia is focused specifically on the students' adaptation to the academic aspects of the school. Structural issues represents the environmental aspects of the transition that faced students as they settled into the new school structure. Both the academia and the structural issues sub-themes, although initially difficult for the students to adjust to, were only immediate, short-term issues.

Academia

This sub-theme was relevant only to the TEE students' transition experience. All TEE students' discussed changes to the academic environment which they had not expected in the new school. The underlying issue within the Academia theme was the pressure surrounding the TEE, "*(TEE is) bigger than year 10 and worth something.*" and "*(TEE is) more important than year 10*". The competition of the TEE was emphasized by the school, "*...they were just saying that 'this is a competition, you are competing with each other just so, to see who gets ranked the best'*". Further, the academic aspects of the transition were stressful to students due to the increased workload both in class and at home: "*My English and maths was pretty tough, pretty stressful because, just the workload, the workload was pretty high.*"; "*Oh the homework! I just can't believe how much it's gone up since year 10*". The pressure was compounded by a perception of being academically behind their peers, "*There were a lot of things we didn't cover (in year 10) so I spent a lot of time catching up in some of my classes. Like chemistry, I spent ages catching up on.*" and

When we got there, like in a lot of subjects, especially human biology, economics, geography, those sorts of subjects, they were a lot

ahead of us because they did it the year before, they did it in year 10. And yeah, we did find ourselves that extra bit behind everybody else.

The TEE students appeared to have difficulty adjusting to the change in emphasis on their academic performance in the new school.

The students' academic experience of the school was also associated with the teacher-student relationships discussed earlier. The change in the teacher role between the schools affected the level of independence and responsibility that was expected of students. There were tighter due dates for assessments at the SHS, and students perceived less help from their SHS teachers than they were used to with their HS teachers for academic work,

In the (HS) if it (a report) was due in that day, you got time in class, help in class, if it wasn't in on time you got an extension. If you had a good enough reason or whatever, but it wasn't that really precise timing. And in class a lot as well they helped you more instead of letting you have your own independence and trying things out for yourself.

The increased independence and responsibility for their academic work was described by another student,

If you don't hand in your work, homework, or if you don't do it in class, like it doesn't bother them (teachers) that much. It's like up to you. If you're going to fail it's your choice. But yeah, they don't make any special effort to remind you about homework or anything. It's sort of just left up to you.

It appears that academia was an important issue for TEE students in their attempts to adjust to the SHS.

The increased academic pressure in the final years of schooling has been highlighted in the literature (Eccles, Midgley et al., 1993; Eccles, Wigfield et al., 1993; Liu, 2003; Stumpers, 2002). However, it was only the TEE participants in this study that discussed it suggesting that the non-TEE students were not concerned about the academic aspects of their schooling. This could be because they were not finding the academia challenging or just not as important to them as it was to their TEE peers.

The students recalled being informed pre-transition by the HS that the academic requirements of year 11 and 12 would be much higher than they were used to. Students were told that there would be more homework, more assessments and tighter deadlines, however, despite this information students' expectations were not in line with the reality of the TEE. The transition in academic requirements appeared to be greater than the students expected and so became a stressful component to their transition experience. It might be that the information given to students pre-transition was not consistent with the realities of the academic requirements of year 11 and 12 (Johnstone, 2001), or perhaps the students' simply could not imagine what the requirements would be like because they have not experienced it before. This could be aided by HS teachers setting higher expectations and academic requirements for year 10 students in order to introduce them to the year 11 and 12 workload prior to the transition. Efforts to inform students of the academic realities of year 11 and 12 could also be supported through developing study skills that would assist students' coping abilities.

Structural Issues

The second school issues sub-theme was structural issues, and this refers to issues surrounding adjustment to the school's structure and organization. This issue was seen as an immediate adjustment issue, however it was not a long-term difficulty and

therefore was not overly important to the students. However, it is an inevitable issue for any person negotiating a new environment. Its lack of prominence may also reflect the success of the schools in preparing students for this aspect of the transition. Students' pointed out that a focus of the pre-transition preparation had been on providing information about the SHS's school rules (e.g., dress and behaviour codes), timetabling, and taking them on a tour of the school. Despite this preparation, they still found it hard finding their way around the new school and catching the right bus home. Although these issues were initially a difficulty for the students, they were not a long-term problem, *"The first week I think getting on the bus was like, you'd think 'oh my god, which one's my bus' 'cause there's like 10 buses or something...probably after the first week it was easier."* and *"... we're in the same classes each period so you know what class you'd be in and you get used to it."*

As other studies have found (Johnstone, 2001, 2002), students' initial discomfort in their new environment was only a short-term issue. Further, it is important to acknowledge that this discomfort can not be prevented, only alleviated (Johnstone, 2001, 2002), as it is inevitable for students' to feel uncertain in their new environment . It appears that the year 10 orientation day was successful in preparing students by giving them some experience with the school lay-out and an overview of a school day at the SHS, and these activities should therefore continue. However, the school could maintain this support post-transition by giving students more opportunities to explore their new surroundings as it is only by experiencing the school's environment that students will settle into it (Johnstone, 2001, 2002).

Summary

In summary, two themes were identified that were central to the students' school transition experience; social relationships and school issues. Social relationships included two sub-themes: peer relationships, which were characterized by segregation; and teacher-student relationships which were focused on a formal, academic level. School issues included academia, the academic aspects of the school transition, and structural issues, which referred to the environmental changes that students' adjusted to. Social relationships were the predominant concern to students as segregation was a long term difficulty.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the transition experience of rural, Western Australian students between a high school (years 8 to 10) and a senior high school (years 11 to 12). Findings differentiated between the short-term, immediate adjustment difficulties that were focused on school issues (academic and structural issues), and the on-going difficulties students had in developing social relationships with peers and teachers. It appears that for these rural students, the transition was complicated by inter-town segregation that prevented students from interacting with their peers. This was compounded by the academic pathways that students selected for their final years of schooling. The academic focus of year 11 and 12 meant that there were fewer opportunities for students to interact in non-academic based activities. Therefore, social interactions were limited to the peers that students met through their classes. The teacher-student relationships were also limited by the academic focus of upper secondary school. Students' perceived a change in the relationships that they had with their teacher due to a change in the roles that teachers played in the school. The teachers undertook a formal, academic role whilst students wanted a more informal, personal

relationship with their teachers as well. The social relationships issue was central to the students' transition experience as it remained an issue for students who were in year 12 and had attended the school for 18 months.

Although the school issue theme was important to the students the difficulties were overcome much quicker. Academic adjustment issues were only of concern to the TEE students who described the pressure surrounding the TEE. This pressure was associated with the increased workload, a perception of being academically behind the other students, and the increased independence and responsibility that teachers placed on students. Structural issues included students' attempts to negotiate the layout of the new school and travel arrangements for school. The school issues were less of a concern to students, perhaps suggesting the success of the schools' current transition preparation aims. It appears though that the schools' current transition programs focused on only one aspect of the transition experience, the school issues. It is important to continue this preparation. However, efforts to facilitate social relationships might assist students in settling into the new school.

Implications and Recommendations

This study has implications for the current body of knowledge of the school transition experience. It appears that research on the factors affecting the school transition experience (e.g., school size) (Alspaugh, 1998; Barone et al., 1991; Blyth, Simmons, & Bush, 1978; Cotterell, 1992; Crockett et al., 1989; Felner et al., 1981; Schiller, 1999) and the effect of the school transition on student outcomes (e.g., grades, self-esteem) (Akos & Galassi, 2004a, 2004b; Alspaugh, 1998; Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Schumacher, 1998) does not represent students' whole transition experience. Whilst such research has provided valuable information, it seems

that there are other aspects of the transition that could not emerge from the quantitative examination of these factors. This study, and others (e.g., Galbo, 1989; Goodenow, 1993a, 1993b; Letrello & Miles, 2003; Osterman, 2000), have highlighted the importance of the social relationships with both peers, and teachers, to students undergoing school transitions. With this in mind, it appears that future school transition research could further explore the relational issues that face students as they negotiate their new environment. Developing a deeper understanding of the importance of social relationships in the school context, particularly in relation to sense of belonging, could benefit the academic function of schools (Booker, 2004; Bronfenbrenner, 1990; Catalano et al., 2004; Goodenow, 1993b; Pretty, Andrewes, & Collett, 1994; Pretty et al., 1996; Rogerson, 2004) .

There are a number of recommendations for the schools that could support the students' adjustment to the school. There needs to be a more social focus to the preparation as this will aid the social relationships in the school. Students discussed an orientation day in year 10 that introduced them to the layout of the school and the classes that they had chosen. However, there were no opportunities for students to interact with their peers, or with the teachers, in a non-academic activity. Non-academic activities would enable social interaction at a personal level and would support the development of social relationships between students and teachers. These activities could be held over a number of days throughout year 10 and 11 to ensure that the social relationships can continue to develop. Further, it might be beneficial to hold a camp in the first few weeks of year 11 which would give students more time to develop relationships with peers and teachers. Students could also meet their class teachers and

other school staff (e.g., Principal, Deputy Principal, Librarian, Office Staff) in order to promote more personal teacher-student relationships in the school.

It is also recommended that year 10 students are more informed about the academic focus of year 11 and 12. Although students described discussions about the academic aspects of upper secondary school it appears that they did not really know what to expect. Efforts to inform students about the academic focus might aid the development of their expectations.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The findings of this research are specific to its context. Consequently, the transferability (Denzin, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994) of these conclusions and recommendations must be explored in relation to other contexts. The rural school transition experience is influenced by issues such as geographic location and inter-town rivalry, issues that may not necessarily be as significant in other contexts. Further, one of the schools used a middle school philosophy while the other was a more traditional senior high school; the qualitative experience of students transitioning between schools of different philosophical and structural approaches may be dissimilar. Future research could examine issues pertinent to metropolitan school transitions, and transitions between schools of different structures and philosophical approaches.

Although the students in the present study discussed adjustment difficulties, it could be argued that they have been successful in their transition as they were still at the school. These participants all displayed a level of self-confidence and independence, characteristics that would have assisted them during their transition. On the other hand, students who have left school early, and may be considered less successful in

negotiating the change, may provide a deeper insight into the issue of school transitions. At the time of the present study, none of the HS students had dropped out of the SHS following the transition. However, future research exploring the transition experience of students who do 'drop out' may help to determine the needs of students who are not successful in adjusting to their new school.

The study was limited by its retrospective nature. Some of the questions asked students to recall their feelings and expectations prior to the transition. Their recollections might not have been an accurate representation of their past experience as their interpretations might include subsequent reflections on these experiences. Future research would benefit from a longitudinal design; interviewing students both pre and post-transition might provide further insight into their transition experience *as* they are experiencing it. This would enable researchers to develop a deeper understanding of the students' pre-transition fears, as well as the post-transition eventualities which could possibly be different to what the students' were expecting.

Finally, it was not possible to carry out a member-check (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) with participants following the interviews. Member-checking would have enabled the participants to verify the researcher's interpretations (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994) and would have enhanced the credibility of the findings (Denzin, 1994; Greene, 1994; Janesick, 1994; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994; Lincoln & Denzin, 1994). However, time constraints and participant availability prevented its use. Although peer-checking, which has been recognized as a method for enhancing credibility (Denzin, 1994; Greene, 1994; Hubermann & Miles, 1994; Janesick, 1994), was utilized future research would benefit from including the member-checking process.

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Appendix A

Interview Schedule

Warm-up
Give student demographics sheet to fill in.
Tell me about your holidays! (build rapport)
(A) Pre-Transition – When you were in year 10...
Tell me a bit about (the) High (school).
What activities occurred during year 10 to help you prepare for (the senior high school)? prompt: orientation?
What did other people tell you about (the senior high school)? prompt: teachers, parents, and friends?
What were your expectations about (the senior high school)? prompt: what were you looking forward to?
What were some of your fears about going to (the senior high school)? prompt: what were you not looking forward to?
(B) Post-Transition – Year 11 at (the senior high school)...
Tell me about your first week at (the senior high school)...
prompt: what happened, feelings?
What did you do to feel comfortable at (the senior high school)?
How did you find the move to (the senior high school)? prompt: easiest and most difficult aspects?
Tell me about (the senior high school)? prompt: extracurricular activities, likes and dislikes?

Tell me what is different about (the senior high school) and (the high school)?

What advice would you give to future year 10's about moving to (the senior high school)?

What do you think can be done to help (the high school) students with the move to (the senior high school)?

prompt: while they are still at (the high school)?

Prompt: once they are at (the senior high school)?

Do you think the transition will have a greater impact on your life?

Appendix B
Demographics Sheet

Name:

Date of Birth:

TEE/Non-TEE:

Appendix C

Information Letter For Participants

An Exploration of the Transition Experience of Students from a Middle to Senior High School in Rural Western Australia

My name is Amiee-Jade Pereira and I am currently studying a Bachelor of Arts Honours (Psychology) at Edith Cowan University. As part of the requirements for my degree, I am researching the transition experience of students from (the) High School to (the) Senior High School. I would like to interview students who attended (the high school) in Year 10 in 2004 and are currently attending (the senior high school) in Year 11. I am interested in finding out about your individual experience of the transition from (the high school) to (the senior high school). There are no right or wrong answers; I am just interested in what *you* think and have experienced. There will be no additional reward for taking part in this study however you might enjoy the interview, and possibly learn a bit about yourself as you share your experiences with me.

The interview may take up to 60-minutes and I would require your permission to audio-tape it. The interview will be held during the July school holidays at a time and place that suits us both. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time, at which time all of your data collected will be destroyed. Your involvement will be totally confidential except in the event that the information disclosed puts yourself or others at risk. The interview will be transcribed, however, your name will not be used and you will not be identifiable. If you have any concerns that arise you may contact the School

Psychologist, (name and phone number removed to protect the individual's identity) or the Principal (name and phone number removed to protect the individual's identity).

This project has gained ethics clearance from the Faculty of Community Studies, Education and Social Sciences Ethics committee.

The results of this study will be presented in my thesis and will also be given to (the senior high school); however, these results will not contain any identifiable information.

If you have any questions or require any further information about the research project, you can contact me on (08) 9377 4769. My supervisor, Julie Ann Pooley, can be contacted on (08) 6304 5591. If you have any concerns or complaints about the research project and wish to talk to an independent person, you may contact Professor Alison Garton on (08) 6304 5110.

If you would like to participate in this study, please read and sign the attached consent form, and return it with your guardian's consent form to the office at (the senior high school). Please retain this letter for your own reference.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Amiee-Jade Pereira: (08) 9377 4769

Appendix D

Participant Consent Form

An Exploration of the Transition Experience of Students from a Middle to Senior High
School in Rural Western Australia

I would like to participate in the research study of the transition experience from (the) High School to (the) Senior High School as described in the attached information letter. I understand the purpose and nature of this study, and I have been given satisfactory answers to any questions I might have had. I am aware that if I have any further questions I can contact the researcher, her supervisor or an independent person. I am aware that this project has gained ethics clearance from the Faculty of Community Studies, Education and Social Sciences Ethics committee. I understand the study will involve tape-recording a conversational style interview that will take approximately 60 minutes. I am aware that the data will be kept confidential and I will not be identifiable. I agree that my data will be presented in a thesis as long as I am not identifiable and that (the) Senior High School will have access to the thesis. I confirm that I have freely chosen to participate in this study, and that I may refuse to answer questions, or withdraw from the study at any time, without any penalties.

Participant's Name: _____

Contact Tel: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E

Information Letter For Parent/Guardian Of Participant

An Exploration of the Transition Experience of Students from a Middle to Senior High School in Rural Western Australia

Dear Guardian

I am writing this letter to seek your permission to interview your child. I am a student at Edith Cowan University, and I am conducting this research as part of the requirements for my Bachelor of Arts Honours (Psychology). The aim of this study is to explore the transition experience of students from (the) High School (Year 10, 2004) to (the) Senior High School (Year 11, 2005). Your child has been invited to participate because I am interested in finding out about his/her experiences.

The interview may take up to 60-minutes and I would require your permission to audio-tape it. The interview will be held during the July school holidays at a time and place that suits us both. Participation is voluntary and your child may withdraw at any time, at which time all of their data collected will be destroyed. His/her involvement will be totally confidential except in the event that the information disclosed puts he/she or others at risk. The interview will be transcribed, however, your child's name will not be used and he/she will not be identifiable. If you have any concerns that arise you may contact the School Psychologist, (name and phone number removed to protect the

individual's identity) or the Principal, (name and phone number removed to protect the individual's identity).

This project has gained ethics clearance from the Faculty of Community Studies, Education and Social Sciences Ethics committee.

The results of this study will be presented in my thesis and will also be given to (the) Senior High School; however, these results will not contain any identifiable information. If you have any questions or require any further information about the research project, you can contact me on (08) 9377 4769. My supervisor, Julie Ann Pooley, can be contacted on (08) 6304 5591. If you have any concerns or complaints about the research project and wish to talk to an independent person, you may contact Professor Alison Garton (08) 6304 5110.

If you agree to your child's participation in this study, please read and sign the attached consent form, and return it with your child's consent form to the office at (the) Senior High School. Please retain this letter for your own reference.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Amiee-Jade Pereira: (08) 9377 4769

Appendix F

Parent/Guardian Consent Form

An Exploration of the Transition Experience of Students from a Middle to Senior High
School in Rural Western Australia

I agree to allow my child to participate in the research study of (the high school) to (the senior high school) transition experience as described in the attached information letter. I understand the purpose and nature of this study, and I have been given satisfactory answers to any questions I may have had. I am aware that if I have any further questions I can contact the researcher, her supervisor or an independent person. I am aware that this project has gained ethics clearance from the Faculty of Community Studies, Education and Social Sciences Ethics committee. I understand the study will involve tape-recording a conversational style interview with my child that will take approximately 60 minutes. I am aware that the data will be kept confidential and my child will not be identifiable. I agree that my child's data will be presented in a thesis as long as he/she is not identifiable and that (the) Senior High School will have access to the thesis. I confirm that my child has freely chosen to participate in this study, and that he/she may refuse to answer questions, or withdraw from the study at any time, without any penalties.

Guardian's Name: _____ Contact Tel: _____

Guardian's Signature: _____ Date: _____