

TRANSFER AND TRANSITIONING: Students' Experiences in a Secondary School in Trinidad and Tobago

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In Trinidad and Tobago, parents, teachers, and students use several factors in selecting a secondary school of their choice. However, not all students are given their first choice of school. In an attempt to ensure the best educational experience available, some parents use the route of requesting, from the Ministry of Education, a transfer out of the school to which the student was first admitted into another they perceive as better. This makes those students “second-transfer” students, as they have already experienced the transfer process from a primary school into a secondary school. Using a phenomenological methodology, this study explored the experiences of the transitioning process of students who transferred from one secondary school to another, as they appeared to have difficulties adjusting to a new school environment. Two male and three female students from Forms 2 to 4, at different stages of transitioning, and three of their teachers were purposely selected to participate in the study. Data collected through interviews were analysed using the Constant Comparative Method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Findings indicated that transitioning positively affected them as they experienced a stable environment in their new school; and negatively affected them academically, with males faring worse than females. Their negative experiences diminished over time as they adjusted and found their niche in the new school environment. The insights gained from the study can be useful to the school administration and the education system in understanding the transitioning process.

Introduction and Background

Schooling in Trinidad and Tobago has long been recognized as a means of social mobility. De Lisle (2012) has indicated that with the introduction of universal secondary education in 2001 in Trinidad and Tobago, access to secondary schools has seen test-based secondary school entrance examinations serving more for placement in a school rather than for selection. In a study of secondary school choice in Trinidad and Tobago, De Lisle, Keller, Jules, and Smith (2009) examined the legacy of how people make choices about which secondary schools they would like

their child to attend. They noted that the Republican Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago grants parents the right to choose their child's school, irrespective of geographical location. School choice, however, is made complex through the number of factors from which parents can choose. Religion, distance from home to school, curriculum, extra-curricular activities, and musical and sporting prestige are some factors that parents, teachers, and students themselves may use in selecting a secondary school of their choice. Older high schools (many denominational in nature) are often parents' "first choice" schools, though some established government schools can also be highly valued. Many other schools, however, are perceived negatively by the public and, as such, parents may not wish their child to attend them.

De Lisle, Smith, Keller, and Jules (2012) revealed that for the period 2001-2005, 27.6% of students in the country were not accepted into their first choice school. When students had to select their school from six choices, as many as 30% of students in the Port of Spain and Environs, Victoria, and Caroni Educational Districts were placed in schools not of their choosing. More male than female students were given their first choice school in six of the eight educational districts for the period 2001-2005, especially in the North Eastern and Caroni Education Districts. The 30% cut-score policy to select remedial students saw more males than females at a disadvantage. Students from low-income areas were more likely not to receive their first choice school, and were placed in a school not of their choosing by the Ministry of Education (MoE). The implications of school choice in Trinidad and Tobago are summed up by De Lisle et al. (2012) as "rather than contributing to increased social mobility, the Eleven Plus placement simply reproduces existing inequalities in the education and social systems, with some males, rural students, and children of the poor especially disadvantaged" (p. 61).

In an attempt to ensure the best educational experience available, some parents use the route of requesting, from the MoE, a transfer out of the school to which the student was first admitted into another that they perceive as better, making those students "second-transfer" students, as they have already experienced the transfer process from a primary school into a secondary school. The Centre for Ethnic Studies at the St. Augustine Campus of The University of the West Indies (UWI, 1994), in a nation-wide study on school placement patterns and practices in Trinidad and Tobago, examined transfers within the school system; the only study to date that has covered this phenomenon in-depth. School principals are permitted by the MoE to accept students after Form 1 across secondary schools. For the period of the study, 1988-1992, the Centre for Ethnic Studies

(UWI, 1994) found that 13% of the school population transferred to schools outside their initial placement schools, and that the number of students transferred increased with Form level. Overall, more females were transferred than males. The reasons for transferring included distance between home and school, especially for those students from low-income households; “not liking the school” for those from upper-income homes; and the initial placement school “not meeting one’s academic needs” for students from low-income homes (p. 329). The mean scores for those transfer students were “significantly lower than others who had initial placement in the school type” (p. 340).

This study examines the experience of second-time transfer students into a highly valued government secondary school in an urban area in Trinidad. Oasis [pseudonym] Secondary School, located in an urban area and established in 1963, is a co-educational government secondary school known for its outstanding academic performance, motivated and disciplined students, as well as its environment of stability and student support. This is reflected in the high number of national scholarships awarded annually to the school, despite the numerous challenges of inadequate space, outdated physical infrastructure, and overcrowding. The school has a teaching staff of 52 and a student population of 943 students in Forms 1 to 6; 25 subjects are offered at the Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate (CSEC) General and Technical Proficiency levels, and 15 subjects at the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) level. As the years progressed, the school continued to produce scholarship awardees; 11 being the maximum number awarded in any one year, thus far.

Students who wrote the 14+ Examination in junior secondary schools were placed in Oasis Secondary from as early as 1972. The examination was written by Form 3 students who attended junior secondary schools at the time. Even though students were required to write the 14+ Examination in Form 3 for further continuation of their education, placement was not dependent on this examination result, but on the student’s and parent’s choice of school, and the MoE’s discretion. The 14+ Examination has been discontinued as the junior secondary schools completed the de-shifting process in 2008. Since this period, there has been increased interest in attending Oasis Secondary, as parents frequently request transfers for their children into the school. Every year, all students at Oasis Secondary would have already experienced the transfer process from their primary schools and, for some older students, from Form 5 in a previous school to the Sixth

Form programme at Oasis Secondary. This study looks at the second-time transfer and transitioning experience of students entering Forms 1 to 3.

In the academic years 2010-2013, 79 students who applied were transferred into Oasis Secondary and, as such, the school exceeded its quota of 35 students per form to between 40 and 43 per form at the Forms 1 to 3 levels. As all secondary schools in the country are not consistent in offering the same curricula, students who transfer into Oasis Secondary may be introduced to unfamiliar subjects, and would then have the task of “catching up.” Such students would not be on a comparative academic level with those who were placed initially in the school. The main researcher, in talking to many transfer students who were experiencing the transfer process for the second time, found that they do not smoothly transition into the system as their academic abilities are not on par with the other students, and that they experience difficulty in forming friendships with their peers. They are unhappy because they have difficulties coping with the quantity of school work, and they also miss their friends. They are seen as outsiders and are not given a fair chance to be viewed as part of the school culture. Psychologically, this labelling places added pressure on the students as they do not feel as though they fit in. It is a common perception that the school’s primary focus is academic excellence, and not all students adjust academically to this new environment at the same pace. Many teachers have voiced their concerns about the large class sizes and the academic, behavioural, and social challenges faced by students who have been transferred to the school.

Presently, there are no concrete systems in place at the school to assist these students after transfer; however, Form 6 students have a mentoring programme, which includes transfer students. The programme addresses low academic achievement faced by some students, but not all students benefit as many teachers and students are unaware of its existence. Additionally, the guidance counsellor, whose services were scheduled by the MoE twice per week for one academic year, has been permanently reassigned to another school. There is little in place to address the social, personal, and emotional issues of the students who have been transferred into the school, and their overall development seems to be delayed in the new school environment.

Kerbow (1996) indicated that students transfer for *exit* reasons to escape inadequate school environments; *attraction* reasons so they benefit from the higher standards; or a combination of both. Exit reasons vary from school violence to parental dissatisfaction with teaching staff. On the other hand, attraction reasons include better academic programmes or the availability of extra-

curricular programmes in the new school. He noted that students who transferred for attraction reasons “are more likely to move to a school of higher academic achievement” (p. 12).

Bandura’s self-efficacy theory and Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory offer explanations on why transfer and transitioning are issues for students. For Bandura (1982), “self-efficacy is concerned with judgements of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations” (p. 122). The strength of one’s self-efficacy determines his/her attitude, behaviour, and cognitive processes. Transferring into a new school may affect a student’s self-efficacy level and his/her belief about his/her abilities because “the stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the more active the coping” (Bandura & Adams, 1977, p. 288). Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) ecological theory emphasizes factors within the environment as important indicators in impacting an individual’s development. The degree of development is determined by the effect of one’s relationship with the environment. These theories are useful in examining the transitioning experiences of students.

Issues Associated With Transfer and Transitioning

Most of the research into transfer and transitioning has been conducted in developed countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and New Zealand; with very little being done, or reported, in the developing countries of the Caribbean, as reflected in the literature. There has been an increasing interest in educational transfer and transition because students’ transitioning experiences impact their academic performance and social development (Galton, Steward, Hargreaves, Page, & Pell, 2009). Transfer is defined as “the move from one school to another” (Galton, Gray, & Rudduck, 1999, p. 5); while transition:

is now considered to involve a significant life situation or phase, a break of continuity, and a changing life context in one’s biography. [It] is a long-term process in which several agents are involved from family, educational setting, social environment, and especially the children themselves. The priority objective of transitions is the re-establishment of the formerly existing balance between subject and environment to cope with the break of continuity - the transition. (Puschner, 2010, p. 27)

Transfer occurs at different ages and levels of education and for different reasons; and for these students, it is the start of a transitioning period. These experiences range from adjustment

issues, which include lower academic achievement levels due to changes of the curriculum between schools, lower self-esteem, difficulty with development of peer relationships, and behavioural problems (Rumberger, Larson, Ream, & Palardy, 1999).

School transfers and transitions are seen as stressful, subjecting youth “to adaptational challenges that tap their coping skills” (Felner, Farber, & Primavera; Lippitt; Moos, as cited in Elias, Gara, & Ubriaco, 1985, p. 112). Coping skills entail “shifts in role definition and expected behaviours, shifts in membership in and position within social networks and a need to reorganise personal and social support resources” (Elias, Gara, & Ubriaco, 1985, p. 112). Coping difficulties also arise if the student does not find his/her own niche in the new environment. Transitioning experiences may impact development, as coping abilities are dependent on factors such as personal maturity, coping strategies, availability of social support before and during transitioning, and the nature of the new school environment (Crockett, Peterson, Graber, Schulenberg, & Ebata, 1989).

Hargreaves and Earl (1990) highlight three areas of concern during transition—student anxiety, adjustment to the new school, and discontinuity in the curriculum. Other issues affecting students’ adjustment include performance and learning new rules and procedures in the new school (Delamont & Galton, 1986; Measor & Woods 1984; Youngman, 1978). Galton et al. (1999) recognized a number of challenges faced by students during transfer and the hindrances to successful transition. They identified critical issues associated with transfer—academic, pedagogical, social, personal, emotional, and gender.

Academic Issues Associated With Transfer and Transitioning

The process of transferring from one school to another may have a negative impact on academic achievement, despite the age of the student (Suffolk Education Department, 1996). As Midgley, Feldlaufer, and Eccles (1988) state, differences in the educational environment before and after transfer contribute to a decline in achievement, motivation, and performance. Those more likely to experience adjustment difficulties in the new school were those who were more motivated academically (Galton et al., 1999). Students’ attitude towards school and performance declined during transition due to changes in how they viewed themselves and their abilities as learners as they matured (Eccles, Wigfield, et al., 1993).

Eccles, Midgley, and Alder (1984) emphasize that as students move into a more competitive school environment, they acquire negative feelings about the school and themselves; hence, they

experience academic difficulties. After transfer, because they are unaware of their strengths in relation to their peers, they eventually experience lower self-esteem and detach themselves (Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991). Hills (1965) uses the term *transfer shock* to describe the transfer students' transition experiences associated with a decline in their grades. Further research on the transfer shock theory by Keeley and House (1993) found that regardless of age and gender, students experienced this phenomenon. The severity of the transfer shock experience was determined by factors such as the age and sex of the student, as well as the time of transfer. Nickens (1972) claimed that there was a lack of evidence to confirm that transfer shock was caused by transfer, and that it was "inappropriate to assume that such a relationship exists" (p. 1). Kerbow (1996) posits that after adjusting to the new environment, the student may recover from the effects associated with transfer and return to his/her normal academic achievement levels, indicating that transfer shock is experienced temporarily.

Galton, Gray, et al. (1999) discovered that students experience a hiatus in academic performance after they transfer. Later studies by Galton, Gray, and Rudduck (2003) found that schools were concentrating more on the academic dimensions of transition rather than the social aspects in order to strengthen academic progress. Galton, Gray, et al. (1999) revealed that this break in performance was due to not adjusting immediately after transfer in the new academic environment. Therefore, the length of time it takes to adjust to the changes in the curriculum is a contributing factor in determining the progress of the student. Doddington, Flutter, Bearne, and Demetriou (2001) found that reasons for this hiatus in performance were increased curricular demands in the new school, new ways of working, lack of parental involvement, and the teaching styles of less experienced teachers.

The Observation Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation (ORACLE) study (Galton, Gray, et al., 1999) evaluated how classroom practice affected pupil progress over the period of transfer. It evaluated how teachers delivered the curriculum and the ways in which students responded to teaching methods. After review of the study, Hargreaves and Galton (1999) found that most teachers began instruction without asking newly transferred students about the curriculum covered in their previous schools, thus putting the students at a disadvantage.

Eccles, Wigfield, et al. (1993) indicated that academic, motivational, and behavioural declines during transition were due to the changing nature to the educational environment. The *stage-environment fit* theory was coined by Eccles, Wigfield, et al. (1993) to explain the fit

between the educational environment and the developmental needs of the adolescent. Their studies revealed that at the adolescent age, there was a decline in motivation and decreased interest in academics upon transfer. It was revealed that the classroom and school environment, and the relationship between the teacher and student influenced student performance and his/her perceived abilities. They noted the importance of investigating the nature of the previous and current school environment in determining students' transitioning experiences. Bronfenbrenner (1994) states that "for outcomes reflecting developmental competence (e.g., mental ability, academic achievement, social skills) proximal processes are posited as having greater impact in more advantaged and stable environments throughout the life course" (p. 38). The relationship between the student and the environment is thus influential in a student's development after transfer.

In Western Australia, Kirkpatrick (1992) found that there was a decline in academic performance in secondary school because the students felt a lack of control over their own learning. They felt that the work was not particularly more difficult, but experienced issues with the increased volume of school work. Students with low ability levels are more likely to display more maladaptive patterns of motivation than their peers (Anderman, Maehr, & Midgley, 1999; Maehr & Anderman, 1993; Russell, 1994).

Rumberger et al. (1999) explain that transferring may negatively affect the student's academic performance upon entry into the new school because of "curricular incoherence," in which the curriculum of the new school differs from that of the previous school. Further, the students are not academically prepared for the new curriculum after transfer, and they have to immediately blend in with the other students without preparation. Similarly, Kerbow (1996) found that students experienced difficulties after transfer when the curriculum differed from that of the previous school. Having to adjust to the new academic standards and curriculum may be a challenge for them. As recommended for a successful transfer, there needs to be a "degree of coherence across the different subject departments" (Galton, Gray, et al., 2003, p. 108).

Mizelle and Irvin (2000) and McGee, Ward, Gibbons, and Harlow (2003) found that involvement in extra-curricular activities assisted students with adjusting academically in their new environment as, after transfer, students who participated in extra-curricular activities and other school activities progressed academically.

Not all students, however, experience academic difficulty while transitioning. Some students sought avenues for coping with higher academic standards in their new educational environment by seeking support from friends and family (Townsend, 1993).

Pedagogical Issues Associated With Transfer and Transitioning

Galton, Gray, et al. (2003) found that the way the curriculum is taught impacts on academic achievement, and that schools are paying more attention to pedagogical strategies when students transfer in order to maintain student progress. Midgley et al. (1988) noted that teachers are a very important part of the classroom environment, and that their teaching styles significantly influence student motivation and achievement.

Teaching strategies and the resulting academic challenges faced is a contentious issue, because not all studies support pedagogical issues as contributing to the lack of progress during transition. Wylie and Chalmers (1999) revealed that students' lack of effort in the classroom resulted in their lack of progress, and not necessarily teaching styles. Apart from the issue of pedagogical concerns, Cocklin (1999) documented that the nature of the teacher also impacted on students' adjustment. Teachers who listened to the students and displayed an interest in their well-being positively impacted on their transitioning process. Findings also indicated that student performance improved when teachers positively impacted on and made a difference in the lives of their students.

Personal, Social, and Emotional Issues Associated With Transfer and Transitioning

Chedzoy and Burden (2005) highlighted social acceptance as most important to students during transition. Wigfield et al. (1991) stated that students experienced changes in their social lives during transition. Immediately after transfer, students' self-concept of ability for social activities declined. The new classroom and school environment was the reason for these social changes experienced by students while transitioning in the new school. Acceptance from peers in the new environment caused students' interest in social activities to increase and their self-concept to improve. Berndt (1999) found that when students encountered new circumstances, establishing a social network positively influenced them. Hertzog and Morgan (1998) noted that during the first year of transitioning in the new school, students experienced feelings of isolation. Proposed reasons for their feelings of isolation and difficult adjustment experiences are the culture of the school and the social aspect of leaving their friends in a familiar environment, where relationships

with peers and teachers have been developed, to go to one where the student has to form new relationships.

Pereira and Pooley (2007) and Puschner (2010) noted that as students transferred across secondary schools, peer relationships and social support were of significance to them during the transitioning process. Barone, Aguirre-Deandreis, and Trickett (1991) report that because friendships and social interactions among young people are crucial, the transfer and transitioning process tends to disrupt friendship networks. At transfer, friendships are seen as an avenue of social support, and Ganeson and Ehrich (2009) found that transitioning students were affected by the discontinuity in peer relationships. After transfer, making friends, fitting in, and dealing with bullying were the biggest challenges faced by students (Howard & Johnson, 2004).

Gender Issues Associated With Transfer and Transitioning

Gender impacts on transfer and transition in different ways. Wagemaker (1993, as cited in McGee et al., 2003) reports that girls may have lower scores and are more negatively affected during transition than boys. Wagemaker (1993) also disclosed that the type of school (single-sex or co-educational) may also play a role in achievement levels. When the academic averages of females in single-sex and co-educational schools were compared, those in co-educational schools obtained averages that were minimally lower than those in single-sex schools.

On the issue that females academically score less than males during the transitioning process, Alton-Lee and Praat (2000, 2001) note that the issue of females outnumbering males when it comes to achievement depended on the subject and transition. It was found that females performed better in some subjects whereas males performed better in others; but this was determined by how well the student transitioned in the school. Transition was found to have a positive effect on boys' performance in mathematics, science, and physical education (McGee et al., 2003). Croll (1983, as cited in McGee et al., 2003) found that girls performed better than boys in the first year of transitioning, although they did not always feel as though they were performing better than the boys in subjects like mathematics. However, Francis (2000) found that after transitioning, girls were generally outperforming the boys in mathematics, science, and all other subjects.

According to Fenzel and Blyth (1986), adjusting to a new social environment in school varies for males and females. Girls have more difficulty than boys with leaving their friends and establishing new relationships. Hirsch and Rapkin (1987) affirm that as girls transfer, they are

more likely than boys to suffer from low self-esteem, stress, and depression, consistent with findings from Eccles, Wigfield, et al. (1993), which noted that females were more negatively affected than males after transfer, particularly their self-esteem. The age of the student at the time of transfer played a role in his/her social development, attitude, and behaviour. The timing of the transfer, specifically the age of the student, explained why girls may be more likely to exhibit symptoms of depression than boys. They attribute this to the fact that girls reach puberty earlier than boys, and girls experience increased psychological issues when compared to boys of the same age during transition (Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987). In terms of behaviour, McGee et al. (2003) stated that boys displayed more negative attitudes towards learning and were more disruptive in the classroom; whereas, girls coped with transition better than boys as they were more “attentive to schoolwork requirements” (p. 51).

Within the Caribbean, Kutnick, Jules, and Layne (1997), in researching gender and school achievement in Barbados, St. Vincent, and Trinidad and Tobago, found that teachers, types of schools, and classrooms played a major role in students' attainment. In Trinidad and Tobago, girls were able to develop academic and social support groups among themselves, while boys did not take advantage of such support. Transitioning into and during secondary school saw a reduction in males participating in schooling.

Belfon-Nedd (2012) researched the second-time transfer experiences of two male and two female students who transferred, at the Form 3 level, from an established government secondary school to a new government secondary school in a rural environment in Trinidad and Tobago. Her findings revealed that, overall, the experience was a positive one. Data collected over just two terms revealed that the students improved in their academic performance, aided by administrative support, teachers, peers, and family members. Easing the transition was a belief in themselves that they could do well. However, the males did not do well academically, as their out-of-school employment during the school term (given the rural environment) made them tired and unwilling to try to cope with the school work, while the female students' adolescent stage led to disruptive behaviour at times. With such limited research into transfer and transitioning, it is difficult to identify common experiences.

Purpose of the Study

Most of the existing literature on transfer and transitioning in schools relates to the transferring and transitioning from the primary to the secondary level, with minimal research on transferring from one secondary school to another, which this study attempts to address. This small-scale research on the experiences of transfer and the transitioning process by transfer students in one secondary school in Trinidad and Tobago can serve to sensitize MoE officials, policy makers, school administrators, and the public to this phenomenon, which can have a negative impact on students, teachers, and the school culture. It aims to bring about an understanding of this annual occurrence in the country.

Three research questions guided the investigation of the experiences of the transitioning process of students who transferred into Oasis Secondary School:

- 1. What are the experiences of students who have transferred to Oasis Secondary school between 2010 and 2013?*
- 2. What strategies did these students adopt in the transitioning process?*
- 3. How is the transitioning process affecting students' experiences at Oasis Secondary School?*

Vocalizing students' issues related to transfer and transitioning based on personal experiences may foster a better understanding of the issues and also promote a stronger sense of belonging in the institution. The voice of the student is therefore fundamental to this study.

Methodology

Ganeson and Ehrich (2009) and Pereira and Pooley (2007) used qualitative methods to describe the “meaning and perception of the transition experience from the student's perspective” (p. 163), allowing the students to “tell it like it is” (p. 163). The phenomenological methodology was chosen to understand the participants' experiences by producing descriptions of their lived experiences. A phenomenological study is one that describes the “common meaning for several individuals of their *lived experiences*” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76), and in this way the transitioning experiences are not described from the researcher's viewpoint, but from the way these lived experiences are described by the participants themselves.

In qualitative research, Creswell (2013) discusses four assumptions that guide the design of the study—the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological—and he states that these beliefs are fundamental in guiding qualitative studies. In this study, the ontological assumption relates to the personal feelings, views, and experiences of the students—their reality. Multiple realities will emerge as similar and dissimilar experiences are revealed by the participants. In this regard, it is important to get the participants' or emic perspective in order to truly understand what the students' experiences are. By exploring multiple viewpoints, conclusions can then be drawn about what it feels like to adapt after transfer, as their experiences are dictated by their reality.

The epistemological principle is one where the researcher develops a relationship with the participant to establish trustworthiness. The relationship developed between the participant and the researcher allows the participant to be comfortable and freely express him/herself during the interviewing process. Axiology acknowledges the role of the researcher's and participants' values that are part of the study. It is key to note that the values, views, beliefs, and personal experiences of the researcher with respect to the study should be set aside by bracketing any prejudged opinions so that the participants' experiences are precisely described, ensuring credibility in the study. Creswell (1998) identifies another assumption, the rhetorical assumption, where the researcher uses qualitative language to arrive at four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, to accurately interpret and construct meaning from the findings. The methodological assumption of this study is “shaped by the researcher's experience in collecting and analyzing the data” (Creswell, 2013, p. 22), so this is where, as the researcher, the concept of transitioning in a new school environment is formulated based on the above assumptions.

Stratified purposeful sampling was utilized to select the students by gender and class to which they were assigned. In purposeful sampling, researchers “intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2012, p. 206). The students were at different stages of transitioning (first year, second year, and third year), and were willing to talk about their experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). To enhance trustworthiness, triangulation of sources was done by selecting three of their teachers for interviewing to provide additional relevant data on these students and the transitioning process. These teachers had years of teaching experience in the school, making them knowledgeable about the issue of transfer and transitioning.

Additional documentation on the participants served as background context. A total of six students were selected—one male and one female from Forms 2, 3, and 4—to communicate experiences based on time spent in the school thus far, and to also gain the perspective of both genders, but one male emigrated during the study. Creswell (2014) notes that for a phenomenological study, the sample size may range from three to 10 participants. Therefore, the researcher made the decision to omit him from the study as sufficient data had been obtained from the other five students to answer the research questions. An interview protocol was used to gather the essence of the students' experiences.

Relevant permission was sought from the MoE and the school's principal, the parents/guardians, and the teachers. They were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw if so desired. The anonymity and confidentiality of the participants involved in the study were ensured as pseudonyms were assigned to all participants, the names of their previous schools, and the names of other students mentioned during the interview process. A major limitation of this study is that the participants had to rely on memory to retrieve retrospective data from one and two years in the past, so the data collection and analysis may be affected due to issues related to poor recollection of information. Participants were informed about the structure of the interviewing process before they were interviewed.

Profiles of Participants

All the participants live with their parents and at least one sibling. Anthony and Nadia play cricket and netball; Sharon is involved in dance and drama; Roger is not involved in any extra-curricular activity; and there was no information stated for Donna's extra-curricular activity. Table 1 summarizes the profiles of the participants.

The three teachers interviewed have been teaching Forms 1 to 5 at the school for more than 10 years. They teach the participants and can provide knowledge and insights on their academic progress and adjustment issues in the transitioning process. Eight interviews were conducted and recorded using a digital recorder, and then transcribed manually. Two participants were re-interviewed to clarify data that emerged following their interviews.

Table 1. Profiles of Students Who Transferred

Name	Age	Gender	Transfer Form Level	Composite Standard Score*	Current Form Level	Assistance Received in Transitioning	Number of Terms in Oasis Secondary School
Roger	15	Male	2	190.5	3	Sixth Form mentoring programme	5
Anthony	15	Male	2, Term 2	N.A.	4	None	7
Nadia	13	Female	2	N. A.	2	None	2
Sharon	15	Female	3, Term 3	215.4	3	None	4
Donna	16	Female	2, Term 2	208.3	4	None	7

Note: The Composite Standard Score from the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) is an aggregate of the raw scores that were converted statistically to rank and place the students in secondary school. The lowest Composite Standard Score assigned to Oasis Secondary is 226.720

The Constant Comparative Method of Glaser and Strauss (1967) was used to analyse the data. Three procedures were used to analyse the data and produce themes: “(1) data condensation, (2) data display, and (3) conclusion drawing/verification” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 12). As participants’ perceptions are highly interpretive, data were repeatedly reviewed and peer-reviewed to highlight codes undiscovered by the researcher, and then reviewed again.

Findings

Six themes were constructed for each research question, namely, Mixed Feelings Throughout the Transitioning Process; School Ethos; Peer and Teacher Relationships; Implemented Coping Strategies; Developmental Competencies; and Recommendations for Easing the Transitioning Process.

RQ 1. What are the experiences of students who have transferred to Oasis Secondary between 2010 and 2013?

Theme: Mixed Feelings Throughout the Transitioning Process

Initial feelings

Participants shared their feelings on the type of environment from which the student came and how the student felt about leaving that environment and coming to a new one. Roger, Sharon, and Donna all disclosed that initially they were unhappy with being transferred from their previous school because they were already settled there. According to Roger, *“I wasn’t happy ‘cause I already made friends and whatever down there, Miss.”* He continued by saying, *“In a way I was angry, Miss,”* while in the same breath, *“I still had a little excitement in meh, Miss ‘cause I was coming to a good school,”* revealing mixed feelings during the transitioning process.

Sharon and Donna both mentioned that initially they were sad because they were leaving their friends. In the early stages of the transitioning process, Sharon cried to return to her previous school and to her friends. Donna revealed that she did not want the transfer and had mixed emotions. In addition to being sad, she was also happy because she was *“going to a better school.”* They also felt fear when they first started attending the school because they were new and did not know the students as yet. *“I was afraid to talk... afraid to make friends,”* said Sharon. Donna’s statement, *“I was real frightened because I didn’t know plenty people,”* indicated that being in a new environment generated fear.

Anthony and Nadia did not experience sadness in the early stages of their transfer; their feelings gravitated towards happiness. *“I felt sort of good being transferring into this school”* and *“I like being transferred in this school”* were their responses, respectively. Their negative experiences and unhappiness in their former schools were responsible for their positive views about transferring into the school. Anthony was unable to cope with the *“strictness”* of the school, and Donna felt as though she did not fit in. Their positive views about transferring into the school communicated feeling content.

Present feelings

After spending two years in the new school and admitting to being in a *“good school”* and forming new friendships, Roger mentioned that he sometimes thinks about attending his former school because he missed some of the school activities. This is clearly revealed in his statement:

Sometimes I still think something will happen...and you know...sometimes I think I was still going to my old school. When I think about it...you know...I have a better chance of doing

better in work here than there because what I really feel is that, down there it have more distractions, nah...than here, Miss. The Carnival celebration, Miss. Down there we had an auditorium and the first year I went there...they told us they raising money for the school. For the school dance, you pay a certain amount of money, Miss and you get to go into the dance. And...they had a religious session too nah, Miss. They had all religions. My feelings....Miss I more comfortable and relaxed here...but I miss those activities in the other school that we had in the auditorium.

Although he felt this way sometimes, he is currently happy in his new school as he feels that he has a better opportunity to excel due to the school culture, and has formed good friendships with his classmates. Anthony, Nadia, Sharon, and Donna are currently all happy with their transfers, although Donna experienced discomfort with some peers in the first term in Form 4. She was unhappy during this period and felt as though she wanted to return to her previous school, after spending five terms in Oasis Secondary. She has resolved her issues and is “more comfortable in the school now.”

Theme: School Ethos

All five students came from different neighbouring schools, so it was interesting to note their reasons for transferring from those schools. The purpose was to shed light on the nature of those schools, thus evincing their experiences. Parental dissatisfaction with the school's environment stood out as major reasons that Roger, Sharon, and Donna transferred out of their schools. Anthony's mother and Donna's father attended Oasis Secondary, and they felt that it was a better institution based on their experiences when they attended the school. Their parents were also satisfied that Oasis Secondary continued to uphold its desirable characteristics. The schools from which Roger, Sharon, and Donna transferred are all known for high levels of student indiscipline. According to Roger:

You always had to keep a watch over your shoulder nah, Miss, because it was that type of school. The children in my old school used to get weapons from anywhere in the class...they used to mash up chair and thing, Miss.

Other than parental dissatisfaction, Donna revealed that her teachers suggested that she transfer out of the school because the school was not suitable to her needs. According to her:

My daddy didn't like the other school because of the discipline of the students. It wasn't good. It had some...a few bad children in the school that give the school a bad name. And then my teachers, too, they were saying that I should take a transfer because I don't suit the school that I [am] in.

All three students mentioned that their parents were uncomfortable with them being surrounded by such violence and thus requested the transfers. Anthony and Nadia said their major reasons for transferring involved teacher-student relationships. Anthony felt that he could not cope with the academic aspect of the school as he felt pressured: *"I experienced some discipline problems because of the home work....I never used to finish it because of the amount as it was due the next day or day after."* Nadia simply felt that she could not relate to the students there because of how they acted: *"I didn't really like the children in the other school.....It was an all-girls school and they just used to act different."* The students all revealed that they knew that they were transferring into a "good school" that has "good discipline and good teachers" and receives "good CXC results." Anthony's description of the school when he said, *"the school environment is a very good and friendly environment,"* suggests that the ethos of the school impacts one's experiences. Anthony expected the school to be more all-rounded, with a balance of academics and extra-curricular activities. In his words, *"I knew it was a good school and an all-round school with the sports and stuff."* He was satisfied with the ethos of the school, as his expectations and the reality of having sports enhanced his transitioning experiences.

The students held these perceptions of the school because of what was told to them by family members and friends who had attended the school. Producing well-disciplined students, obtaining exemplary examination results, and an overall friendly atmosphere are some aspects of the school ethos described by the students. They expected favourable attributes in their new school.

Theme: Peer and Teacher Relationships

All participants unanimously stated that they made friends when students approached them, and they all, except Sharon, knew at least one person, either family member or friend, who was going to the school at the time of transfer, thus making their experiences more comfortable. Roger, Anthony, Nadia, and Sharon described their experiences with their peers and teachers in their new school as being positive. Roger expressed thus:

My classmates. They always included me and the other person who got transferred in my class. They always included us. They never leave us out of a group, Miss. For school work they never leave us out. I would say the students really helped me.

Donna expressed some negative experiences with peers and one teacher. Donna does not socialize with some of her peers because she is of the opinion that *"they like too much confusion."* She does state, though, that there are only a few students she considers her friends. Donna suffered from verbal abuse from her peers as she says, *"at first it was bad 'cause...you know...it had children who bullied me a little bit."* She also said that she was verbally bullied but could not recall all the things that were said to her: *"I can't really remember all the stuff they used to tell me nah, but it was hurtful stuff."* Not intentionally on the part of the students, the reliance on memory to retrieve retrospective data as well as the possibility of information being withheld are two limitations that were encountered.

Anthony did not reveal his experience of being bullied when he entered the school during his first interview. During a second interview, he said that he had not remembered when interviewed initially, but he remembered when he went home and then mentioned it to his mother. He disclosed that he only experienced this verbal abuse from some of the boys in his class for a short time in Form 2 when he first came, and it discontinued after that period. In his interview, he did say that at first he *"didn't really feel part of the class,"* and although he says that presently he gets along with his peers, he spends a lot of time with students in the higher Forms.

Donna revealed that the teaching strategies of one of the teachers were difficult to comprehend and her experiences with him were not favourable: *"It was just one teacher I didn't have a good experience with, Mr. John, he's just different...sometimes I don't understand what he is teaching."* In Roger's case, he said that he did not have any problems with any of his teachers, but some of his responses and those of two teachers did not support his statement. His statement that *"they treat me kind of normal but they think I should be doing more work...they moving at a pace and I trying to catch up, but they find I [was] not doing enough work"* indicates that his experiences with them were not totally positive. He also disclosed that he had to be disciplined for not doing homework and for loitering in the corridor. His undisciplined behaviour in the classroom (mentioned by the male teacher) and not bringing his book to school were matters that the Dean had to address. Mr. Fraser's statement, and Roger's description of his treatment by his teachers as *"kind of normal,"* along with his view that teachers could assist students if they *"cut them a little*

slack,” indicate that he did experience minor issues with some teachers. He admitted that, as he reflected on his circumstances, he realized that the teachers were really helping him. Anthony, Donna, and Nadia’s perception of teachers being “*really nice*,” and developing a closer relationship with teachers are some positive experiences that assisted students in the transitioning process.

RQ 2. What strategies did these students adopt in the transitioning process?

Theme: Implemented Coping Strategies

The views of the teachers revealed that students adopted varying strategies during the transitioning process. Miss Gibson revealed that Roger had some behavioural and academic issues upon transferring. According to her, she had to “*handle matters involving many things such as smoking, drinking and not doing homework*.” She felt that he might be the ringleader or was being influenced by some of the boys who were always getting into trouble. Mr. Fraser noticed that the students in class tried to speak like Roger and even followed him as he was seen as being “popular” and “cool.” In his view, Roger seemed to have an effect on the students: “*I think that the students are afraid of Roger...because they see him as being popular*,” he said. According to Mr. Fraser, Roger was quiet when he was first transferred and then his behaviour negatively changed as he was portrayed as the ringleader in the class. For Sharon, the friendliness of the students made it easy for her feelings to change from sadness and fear to happiness. Her strategy included taking full advantage of forming close-knit relationships and seeking social support from the students in her class.

One strategy Donna adopted was associating herself with the wrong company, which negatively affected her grades. Upon realizing that this was not benefitting her, she made the decision to isolate herself and minimize the time she spent with the students in her class as, to her, some of them are somewhat distracting: “*I really prefer to stick by myself*.” Anthony adopted two strategies. He alienated himself from his classmates due to initially not feeling as part of the class in Form 2, and although two years had passed, this approach seemed to satisfy him. He formed a bond with the Physical Education teacher and he also, along with Nadia, sought involvement in extra-curricular activities as a strategy for transitioning to the school by participating in cricket and netball, respectively.

RQ 3. How is the transitioning process affecting students' experiences at Oasis Secondary?

Theme: Developmental Competencies

Academic

SEA scores were unavailable for Anthony and Nadia, while those for Roger, Sharon, and Donna were below the required scores applicable for entry into Oasis Secondary School (see Table 1). Four of the five students experienced a decline in their grades (the other student remained at the same level) after the first term in their previous school. A similar pattern was found upon entry into Oasis Secondary School, where there was a decline in academic performance in the first term after being transferred into the school.

Common to all students were the levels of difficulty adjusting to the academic aspect of transitioning, albeit to varying degrees. In Roger's view, "*the standard of work was plenty times higher than the school that I came from, Miss.....anytime I get the hang of it, Miss, the work just keeps getting harder.*" This indicated difficulty coping with the academics at Oasis Secondary. All the students experienced adjustment difficulties because to them, "*it was plenty work*" and "*the work was kind of hard.*" They were also introduced to unfamiliar subjects upon transfer.

Difficulty coping with the academic aspect of transferring affected the students' experiences. They realized that they had to apply extra effort in order to reach the same academic standards as their peers. "*If I don't study I would not do well, but if I do study, I do well,*" Sharon confessed. Anthony's effort came in the form of seeking assistance in English and mathematics from his sister and cousin, who were both attending university. He acknowledged that he was not performing well as he said "*I wasn't doing too well...I was falling back in my subjects. It was plenty work.*" Donna made the decision to apply more time to her studies because she wanted to succeed in her CSEC examinations, and Roger was willingly accepting assistance from Form 6 students in Oasis Secondary School.

Miss Gibson saw a need for an intervention upon noticing Roger's academic and behavioural issues. She noticed that he was having literacy and numeracy issues, and that the transitioning process was negatively affecting his experiences, as his academic work and behavioural developmental disposition seemed to deteriorate. She stated:

This past year his progress seemed to deteriorate and his name kept being called involving matters with other boys in the class who were always getting into trouble....I realized that he was having some difficulties with his school work so I advised him to study harder.

Mr. Fraser found that Roger’s performance was “*awful...poor*” when he first transferred into the school, but had seen a slight improvement in his attitude towards his work by “*trying to catch up.*” However, Mr. Fraser found that Roger still struggled in the classroom. Anthony and Nadia were also mentioned as being academically weak by Mr. Fraser and Miss Charles.

Figure 1 shows the academic performance of the students. The academic percentages for Roger and Anthony from the time they were transferred into the school to the time of the study remained below 50%. Nadia, Sharon, and Donna succeeded in maintaining an average above 50%, except in their first term in the school where they were below 50%, which shows that they did not academically adjust in the first term. Donna mistakenly said that her school work dropped in the second term when she transferred, but her records show that it was in her third term that there was a decline in her overall percentage. Sharon’s academic records confirm her statement of improving after the first term when she said “*I went up real plenty.*”

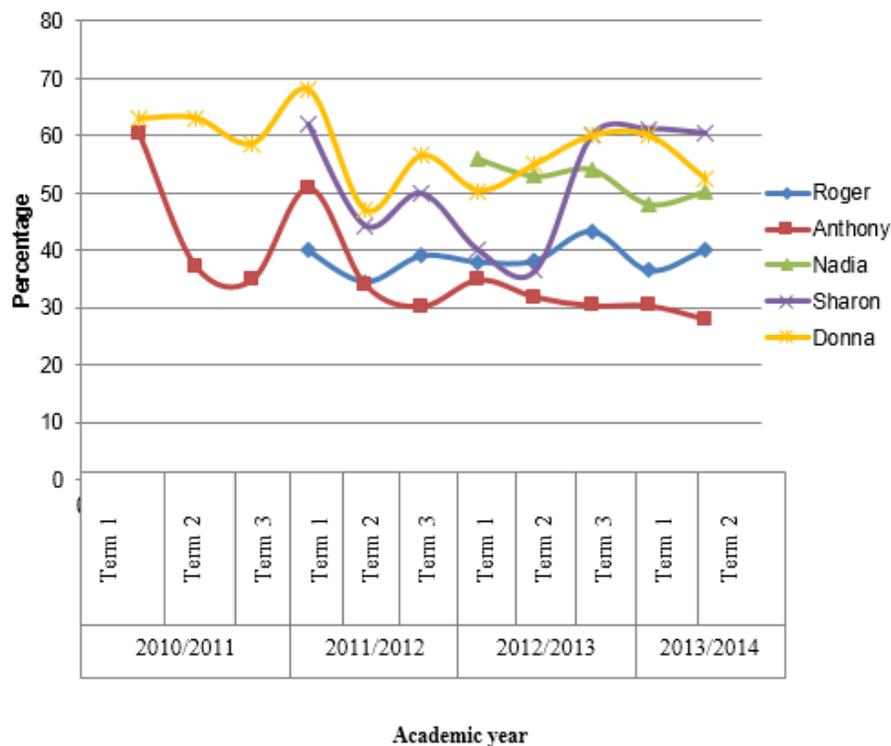


Figure 1. Academic performance of ‘transfer’ students from 2010 to 2014.

Behavioural

Although Miss Charles and Mr. Fraser gave similar statements about the students being academically weak, they gave contradictory statements on Roger's behaviour in the classroom. Mr. Fraser lamented that in the classroom, Roger did not walk with his books for his class and "*just puts his head on the desk or grinning foolishly.*" In Mr. Fraser's estimation, Roger's behaviour changed from being quiet to being a ringleader within one month. Miss Charles found that Roger's behaviour was commendable, as she disclosed that in her class, "*he shows interest because he is always asking questions, especially if he doesn't understand something.*" Miss Gibson did disclose that he had confided his dislike for some teachers to her, which is an indication that his behaviour in the classroom was based on his feelings towards his teachers and the subject area. Although Miss Gibson found that Roger's progress seemed to deteriorate during the year of transfer, she did commend his efforts to improve in his academic abilities. She noted that his delinquent friends "*tease him, but he is focused and does not care about what they say.*"

Miss Charles also observed that Anthony's behaviour changed from when he was first transferred. He reached to class late and was more talkative in the classroom. His transitioning experience from Forms 2 to 4, namely, difficulty bonding with classmates and academic issues, had led to noticeable negative behavioural changes. Consultation with the teachers on behavioural aspects of the students' transitioning process revealed that the male students had more behavioural issues than the female. The female students were found to be better behaved in the classroom. This was corroborated by statements from the teachers: "*Sharon was never in any disciplinary problems. She is well-behaved,*" said Miss Gibson. Mr. Fraser admitted that "*Nadia doesn't give any trouble in terms of behaviour, she is quiet in class...the girls are quieter in the class than the boys.*"

Social and emotional

Of all the students, the transitioning experiences for Donna adversely affected her social experiences in the new school. Being verbally bullied, from when she was first transferred to the time of data collection, impeded the social aspect of her transitioning progress. Although Anthony suffered the same verbal abuse from some male classmates in Form 2, his social life at the school was not hampered to the same degree as Donna's. Her emotional abuse lasted for a longer period than his and had a greater effect on her. Sharon, Nadia, and Roger experienced favourable social

experiences upon transitioning, and they stated that they were satisfied with the friendships they developed and maintained. The transitioning process for them, therefore, positively affected their social experiences.

Theme: Recommendations for Easing the Transitioning Process

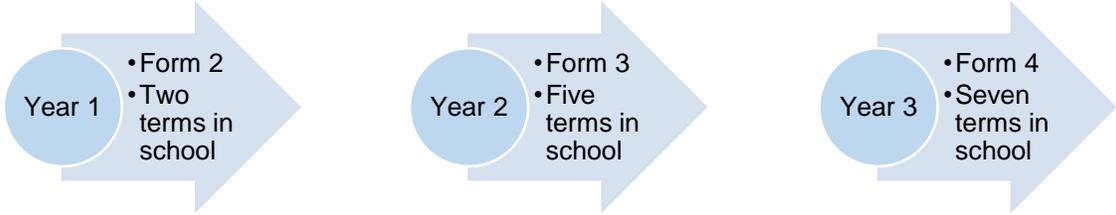
Recommendations ranged from adopting programmes, to assisting students with academic difficulty, to simply treating them “normal” by spending more time with them. Roger gave his views on making the transitioning process easier for students. He spoke from experience as he explained that sometimes a teacher may ask a question about a topic that was covered in Form 1 and expect all the students to have knowledge about the topic—even the students who transferred into the school. According to him, this embarrasses the student, so he recommends that the teacher should “*cut them a little slack,*” but at the same time “*set the rules*” because the students are in a new school and have to adjust to the new rules. Sharon also spoke from experience and felt that if teachers and students are friendly, students would adjust easier. This advice given by her was one that assisted her in adjusting socially and emotionally to the school. The recommendations given covered the academic, behavioural, and social developmental dispositions of the students.

In Tables 2 to 6, the transitioning process is mapped for each student according to school terms. These tables show how the students felt, the strategies they adopted, and the effect of the transitioning process on their experiences from the first term of their transfer. The changes in their feelings, academic progress, behaviour, and strategies can be viewed to understand how the transitioning process differed or were similar for each student.

Table 2. Process of Transitioning for Roger

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unhappy with transfer • Feelings of anger about leaving previous school • Feelings of minor excitement in attending a “good school” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happy with transfer. Feelings of satisfaction in new school • Occasional feeling of nostalgia - missing some school activities in previous school • “Comfortable and relaxed” in new school
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reserved – “ wasn't much of a talker” <p>Did not want to associate with students in new school due to reluctance to transfer from previous school</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Became a ringleader • Classmates played a major role in assisting in the adjustment process <p>Formed friendships</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic difficulty <p>Performance below 50%.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not receiving assistance with academics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance increased in Term 1, then increased slightly in Term 2 but remained below 50% • Tutored by Sixth Form students four days per week
<p>Male teacher's perspective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor academic performance • Does not bring subject text to school • No interest shown in the classroom 	<p>Male teacher's perspective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brings subject text to school. Trying to catch up but still struggling • No observed improvement in academic performance
<p>Female teacher's perspective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academically weak when first transferred into school 	<p>Female teacher's perspective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows interest in the classroom
<p>Dean's perspective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavioural issues - smoking and consuming alcohol • Associating with clique of troublesome boys 	<p>Dean's perspective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More focused • Displays confidence in the classroom

Table 3. Process of Transitioning for Anthony



Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form 2 • Two terms in school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form 3 • Five terms in school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form 4 • Seven terms in school
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unhappy in previous school • Happy with transfer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happy with transfer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happy with transfer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experienced verbal bullying from male students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal bullying discontinued 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not experience bullying
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not feel as part of the class. Spent more time with students already known than with classmates in new school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associating with students in the higher Form classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continues to socialize with students in the higher Forms rather than with classmates
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experienced academic difficulty. Overall performance below 50% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slight increase in Term 3 and decline in Term 4 • NCSE exam written in Term 5 • Overall performance below 50% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage declined in Term 6 and declined again in Term 7 • Overall performance below 50%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joined the school cricket team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member of school cricket team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continues to be a member of the school cricket team

Table 4. Process of Transitioning for Nadia



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unhappy in previous school Happy about transferring from former school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happy about transferring into new school
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scared about being a new student and meeting new students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accustomed to classmates, comfortable in class Formed friendships with classmates
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Felt lonely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not lonely
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic difficulty Overall performance just below 50% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slight improvement in performance. Overall performance 50.2%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not involved in extra-curricular activities in school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involved in extra-curricular activity

Table 5. Process of Transitioning for Sharon



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unwilling to transfer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happy about transfer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of sadness • Wanted to return to previous school • Missed friends in previous school • Afraid to talk and make friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of satisfaction in new environment • Formed new friends • Established good relationships in new school
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance below 50% at the end of first term in the school • Performance significantly increased at the end of second term in school • Overall performance above 50% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance increases slightly then decreases slightly • Overall performance remains above 50%

Table 6. Process of Transitioning for Donna

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of happiness and sadness about transferring to a new school • Frightened • Shy • Scared about coming to a new school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “<i>Not frightened and sad anymore</i>” • Feels more comfortable in school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comfortable in school
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experienced verbal bullying from female students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal bullying ceased • Formed friendships with students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal bullying resumed in Term 6 and stopped in Term 7 • Does not socialize with the popular students • Socializing with a few students in class
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associating with two students who were a negative influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continues to associate with students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stopped associating with students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance below 50% at the end of first term in school • At the end of the second term, performance significantly increases • Performance above 50% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance decreases in Term 3 and increases in Term 4 • NCSE exam written in Term 5 • Performance above 50% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance increases in Term 6 and decreases in Term 7 • Performance above 50%

The participants who experienced transitioning revealed the strategies they used to cope, and gave advice on how to make the transitioning process easier for students who transfer.

Discussion

For the transitioning process across secondary schools, some of the findings concur with those from primary to secondary schools, but there were other components that unfolded during the transitioning process at Oasis Secondary School. Kerbow (1996) indicated that students transfer for *exit* and *attraction* reasons. The UWI Centre for Ethnic Studies (1994) found similar reasons in their research, such as transferees not liking their assigned school. It was clear from the students' responses that they transferred for *exit* reasons, which were coupled with *attraction* reasons, as they disclosed the desirable characteristics of Oasis Secondary School.

Immediately after transferring to Oasis Secondary School, participants experienced feelings of isolation (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998) and anxiety (Galton, Gray, et al., 1999). Although some of them were familiar with students attending the school, this did not negate the fact that transferring generates feelings of isolation and anxiety because of moving from the known to the unknown (McGee et al., 2003).

At the time of data collection, all participants were at various periods of the transitioning process, and seemed to have experienced a decline in their performance in the first term after transfer, similar to that noted by Galton, Gray, et al, (1999), who observed that students experience a decline in academic achievement immediately after they transfer into a new school. This dip in performance, however, was temporary (Galton, Gray, et al., 1999; Kerbow, 1996), because the students who transferred into Oasis Secondary School most likely had not yet adjusted to the school. Four students' grades improved in the second term after transfer. The ages of the participants who transferred into the school were 13 to 16 years old, and they all experienced the decline, supporting the finding of the Suffolk Education Department (1996) that transitioning has a negative impact on achievement despite the age of the student. They may have experienced this dip in performance due to the change in the educational environment in terms of higher academic standards and curricular incoherence (Rumberger et al., 1999). The findings also appear to corroborate the transfer shock theory (Hills, 1965), because the students were in an unfamiliar environment and did not adjust to the new procedures (Delamont & Galton, 1986; Measor & Woods 1984; Youngman, 1978). The students also experienced some curriculum incoherence (Rumberger et al., 1999) at Oasis Secondary, as they all indicated that some of the subjects in the school were new to them as they had not been introduced to them in their previous schools. They appeared to be disadvantaged in that respect.

The average time period suggested for students to adjust to the new school environment is within six months (two terms), and up to one year (three terms) to improve in academic performance (Mertin, Haebich, & Lokan; Sebba, as cited in McGee et al., 2003). This finding was not seen to be evident at Oasis Secondary, because after the decline in performance in the first term, the students' grades continued to fluctuate at the end of every term. This suggests that time varies for each student depending on the relationship between other contributing factors of transitioning and the rate of adjustment.

Differences in transitioning based on gender were seen after the first term in their new school, where all the female participants appeared to perform better academically than the male students, thus supporting findings from Keeley and House (1993) and McGee et al. (2003). Although all the students' grades did fluctuate, the female students had somewhat adjusted academically because they maintained grades above 50% from the second term after transferring to the time of data collection. The two male students, however, appeared not to have adjusted academically, as their grades remained below 50% since transferring. It must be noted that three female and two male students participated in this study, so that the data are female-dominated and not balanced in terms of gender. At Oasis Secondary School, the girls seemed to cope better academically and were also better behaved than the boys in the classroom (as confirmed by the teachers). McGee et al. (2003) gave reasons such as the boys having "negative attitudes towards learning," while the girls were more "attentive to school requirements" (p. 51). In this instance, the link between the attitude of the boys and learning, particularly Roger, may have had more to do with the class and the teacher, and not particularly with having a negative attitude towards learning. It was found that he applied effort in certain classes, as he favoured some teachers more than others. Galton, Gray, et al. (2003) found that the association with liking a teacher and subject determined how well a student progressed. The challenges Roger experienced in some classes were probably due to the teacher's disposition, as suggested by Eccles, Wigfield, et al. (1993), who found that the relationship between the teacher and the student influenced performance and the student's perceived abilities. The students disclosed that the social element of transferring negatively affected them in the initial stages.

McGee et al. (2003) found that students who were involved in extra-curricular and other school activities were more likely to progress academically during transition. This appeared not to be so for Anthony. Out of all the students, he was the one most involved in extra-curricular

activities from the initial stages of transferring, but after spending three terms in the school, his academic performance had been declining since after his first term in Form 3. When reviewing his “Process of Transitioning” table (Table 3) in an attempt to ascertain what factors caused this decline during this period of transitioning, he indicated that he had adjusted to the school, so it was unclear what caused this low performance. He associated with students in higher Forms, but it was uncertain whether this behaviour had any negative impact on his achievement. These findings suggest that Anthony’s strength was in non-academic areas.

All the students had experienced some form of dissatisfaction in their previous school environment, which had initiated the transfer. Even though challenges were faced in their new school, the students’ prior knowledge of and positive overall perspectives of Oasis Secondary School may have accounted for their feelings of comfort and satisfaction in their new school environment. This supports Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) findings, which state that more advantaged and stable environments foster developmental competence.

Initially students felt isolation, anxiety, sadness, anger, and fear, but those feelings appeared to gradually diminish as they became more familiar with the students, teachers, and school. The feelings of the three students who initially had mixed feelings about the transfer appeared to have changed to positive feelings. The two students who were unhappy in their previous schools and were happy about transferring out of those schools appeared to remain with the same feelings of satisfaction about the transfer.

Two important findings emerged from this study that were not found in the literature. The first one pertained to parents choosing their alma mater as their school of choice for their children. Those parents who sought transfers for their children into a school that they had also attended might be indicating that they were satisfied with the school environment and wanted their children to experience the same quality of education they had received during their time in the school.

The second finding that emerged from the study which was not found in the literature was that of the reported perceptions of the students who initially passed for Oasis Secondary School. The transfer students’ perceptions of these students were based on the positive and negative treatments they received from them. This was an issue for two students who were verbally bullied when they started attending the school. On the other hand, there were those who warmly welcomed and were friendly towards the students who were transferred into their classes.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, the administration could request transfer students' academic and behavioural records from their previous schools, so that teachers would have knowledge of their background and for the school to be better prepared for the incoming students. This could easily be done, or made formal in the transfer process, providing the sending school collects such data.

To address the academic issues experienced, transfer students could possibly enter during the first term and not in the second and third terms. This could minimize the loss of components of the curriculum that are introduced at the start of the academic year, and allow the student to cover the full three terms' work. This, however, might present a challenge as the speed of the transfer process depends on the time of the request made on behalf of the student (usually at the start of the academic year) and the bureaucratic process of finalizing the transfer at the MoE.

The administration could also organize tutoring programmes during the July/August vacation, or after school, so that the students are academically prepared and are attuned to the curriculum before they enter their new school. This, however, is dependent on teachers volunteering their vacation time to conduct these sessions; or finding ways to attract qualified tutors.

Organization of remedial classes in literacy that would positively impact all subject areas should also be available to the students during the term. Teachers and interested students in Form 6 need to be exposed to elements of the teaching of reading in content areas, under the guidance of reading specialists, on professional development days in the school. However, this depends on the number of specialist teachers in the educational system, and their willingness to do so.

The school could also initiate a mentoring programme to promote the all-round development of the student. The mentors could be role models in the form of a "big brother" or a "big sister" in the school. These mentors could have weekly sessions with the students as often as necessary. This programme would likely assist students, whose strengths may be non-academic, to help balance both academic and non-academic pursuits.

Sensitization programmes for the teachers could also be addressed by the school administration during professional development days. Teachers often overlook the fact that the students who have transferred into the school are coming from the known to the unknown, and they therefore should adopt a more welcoming and caring attitude toward them to foster positive teacher-student relationships. Teachers should also be cognizant of the impact they have on the

students' lives; likewise, students could also be sensitized to those who are transferring into the school to promote positive peer relationships. Orientation programmes that include social activities could help alleviate the social and emotional issues in adjusting to the school.

The behavioural aspect in the classroom could be addressed by reducing the number of students in the classroom. Forty-three students in one class is a large number for one teacher to effectively control. The MoE could reconsider allocating more than 35 or 40 students per class. However, placing a transfer student into a school, despite the recognition of exceeding class size, is often out of the hands of the principal, who might find it difficult to refuse the student.

The appointment of a guidance counsellor to the school could also aid in addressing the behavioural aspects of the students. In terms of social and emotional factors, the guidance counsellor could conduct sessions with the students immediately after transferring into the school to offer guidance and support; and to offer assistance in and enhance the all-round (academic, personal, social) development of the students. Sessions could be conducted with the students on adopting proper study skills and on how to manage social issues.

The continuous in-house collection, use, and sharing of data on second-time transfer students' academic performance in literacy and numeracy, social engagement in school activities, and school and class attendance could be encouraged in building a research ethos among professionals in the school, which this study initiated at Oasis Secondary. Since the study was conducted in one school in Trinidad and Tobago, it is suggested that further research of this nature be done throughout the country and the rest of the Caribbean in order to gain deeper insights into the phenomenon of second-time transfer students across secondary schools, to help in easing the transfer and transitioning process.

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