Exploring the role and impact of transition teachers in Scotland using participatory and creative methods

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Abstract

This empirical study examines a topic of great relevance to education researchers, policymakers and practitioners worldwide: school transitions. Specifically, it focuses on the role and impact of transition teachers in Scotland, staff employed solely to support a young person's transition from primary to secondary school. To provide clarity for readers from diverse local, national or international contexts, the study defines its objectives, research questions, design and methodology. Furthermore, it delineates analytical categories related to the findings, linking them to a wider discussion about the opportunities and challenges associated with this transition teacher role. These findings will be of use to educational organisations across the globe who are seeking to improve transition support practice.

Keywords: primary to secondary school transition(s); transition teacher(s); creative methods; participatory methods

Resum. *Explorar el paper i l'impacte del professorat de transició a Escòcia mitjançant mètodes participatius i creatius*

Aquest estudi empíric examina un tema de gran rellevància per als investigadors, els responsables polítics i els professionals de l'educació a tot el món: les transicions escolars. Concretament, se centra en el paper i l'impacte del professorat de transició a Escòcia, personal contractat únicament per donar suport a la transició d'un jove de l'escola primària a la secundària. Per proporcionar claredat als lectors de diversos contextos locals, nacionals o internacionals, l'estudi defineix els seus objectius, les preguntes de recerca, el disseny i la metodologia. A més, delinea categories analítiques relacionades amb les troballes i les vincula a una discussió més àmplia sobre les oportunitats i els reptes associats a aquest paper de professor de transició. Aquestes troballes seran útils per a organitzacions educatives de tot el món que busquen millorar les pràctiques de suport a la transició.

Paraules clau: transició de primària a secundària; professorat de transició; mètodes creatius; mètodes participatius

Resumen. *Explorar el papel y el impacto de los docentes de transición en Escocia utilizando métodos participativos y creativos*

Este estudio empírico examina un tema de gran relevancia para investigadores, legisladores y profesionales de la educación de todo el mundo: las transiciones escolares. Específicamente, se centra en el papel y el impacto del profesorado de transición en Escocia, personal contratado exclusivamente para apoyar la transición de jóvenes de primaria a secundaria. Para brindar claridad a lectores de diversos contextos locales, nacionales o internacionales, el estudio define sus objetivos, las preguntas de investigación, el diseño y la metodología. Además, define categorías analíticas relacionadas con los hallazgos y las vincula con un debate más amplio sobre las oportunidades y los desafíos asociados a este papel de profesor de transición. Estos hallazgos serán de utilidad para organizaciones educativas de todo el mundo que buscan mejorar las prácticas de apoyo a la transición.

Palabras clave: transición de primaria a secundaria; docentes de transición; métodos creativos; métodos participativos

Summary

1. Introduction

Moving from primary to secondary school requires children and young people to adapt to multiple changes, often over a short period of time. This is not just in terms of getting used to different subject teachers and more homework, but around navigating new peer groups and social rules, all the while dealing with the hormonal effects of puberty (Jindal-Snape, 2016). Moreover, these transitions constitute an important developmental 'status passage' in contemporary society (Glaser & Strauss, 1971; Measor & Woods, 1984). Young people want and need a sense of continuity, and signs that they are being treated differently to when they were at primary school (Galton & McLellan, 2018).

A large-scale, longitudinal study in Scotland indicated that the majority of young people both look forward to this transition and report that they enjoyed the experience when asked about it later (Jindal-Snape et al., 2023). However, a fifth were unhappy, and evidence suggests these young people are more likely to have some form of additional support need related to a social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulty (Gilbert et al., 2021). Moreover, a negative experience of this transition can have longer-term consequences, predicting lower exam scores and adversely affecting wellbeing (West et al., 2010). Barber (1999) described this transition as a 'muddy river', whose safe crossing necessitates 'five bridges' (Galton et al., 1999): managerial or administrative links between schools, pedagogical practices, curriculum, support in develop-

ing skills in management of learning and help with addressing social and emotional issues such as friendships and bullying (Galton et al., 1999).

In Scotland the support given to young people to help them manage this varies, although there are common practices (Jindal-Snape, 2016). These include familiarization visits, often over successive days, which help pupils become accustomed to the physical layout of the high school, and moving between classes. Sometimes learners from different primary schools may attend events together or go away on a residential trip, expanding friendship networks as well as developing their sense of independence. Many primary school teachers will also talk to their class about myths and horror stories they might have heard from older peers and sometimes parents, as a way of trying to reduce anxiety. The digital dimension to the transition process is increasingly important, as it ensures that up-to-date information about children and young people is recorded and shared between schools efficiently.

However, one innovative approach involves employing education staff whose sole focus is supporting young people with this specific transition. Where the study discussed in this paper took place, the local authority had used central government funding designed to aid education recovery and raise pupil attainment (Scottish Government, 2022) to create the role of the 'transition teacher'. Each transition teacher worked in one of the 23 clusters (or learning communities) spread across the city, these being made up of a single secondary school and their various feeder primary schools.

1.1. Literature Review

Based on a rapid literature review using three abstract and indexing databases (PsychINFO 1967-present; EBSCO; Web of Science: Social Sciences Citation Index and Social Policy and Practice), there were no studies that sought the views of staff whose main function was supporting learners to transition to secondary school. Perhaps reflecting the recency and rarity of such specialist educational roles, most of the existing literature related to interviewing teachers whose responsibilities included planning school transitions. For example, in Strand's (2020) paper, predictable processes, the psycho-social learning environment, providing adequate time and collaboration were all seen as vital to a positive outcome for the young person. Holt et al.'s (2023) participants highlighted similar themes around the importance of relationships, connecting with community and a positive school environment. A study in Australia pointed to problems with communication and differing levels of commitments, with little understanding of roles between tiers, and staff in primary settings sometimes adopting a more passive stance (Hopwood et al., 2016). Relevant here are other studies which suggest many teachers cite a lack of training around developing their transition practice (Jindal-Snape & Cantali, 2019; Hanewald, 2013). There are studies where the term 'transition workers' is deployed but these relate to other practice contexts. For example, in Cleverley et al.'s (2018) programme evaluation at two hospitals in Canada, 'transi-

tion workers or coordinators' (p. 229) refers to staff who assist young people with significant and complex needs moving from child and adolescent mental health services onto adult teams. Morgan et al. (2014) use the term 'transition teacher' (p. 150) in their research but solely to refer to practitioners supporting young people with disabilities leaving school. It was Ecclestone (2009) who observed that schools, colleges and universities were employing 'transition workers', and merited further research. She noted that these specialist staff:

> help others to simplify the navigation of new structures and systems, contribute to procedures for initial assessment and tracking progression through the system, and support the emotional or psychological demands of transition. (p. 13)

This article will begin to address a gap in the existing literature by exploring the views and experiences of 'transition workers' supporting young people's transition to secondary school. It will set-out the research design, and will outline the specific participatory and creative research methods used. It will then discuss key findings, which are structured around the metaphor of a river that practitioners identified in the workshop. Finally, it will discuss implications for policy, practice and future research.

2. Methods

My involvement in an action research project alongside a Scottish third-sector organisation allowed me to make links with education practitioners who wanted to improve transition processes and practices locally. This included the transition teachers mentioned above. At their team meeting in December 2022, I was informed of ongoing challenges around their training, leadership and resourcing. Three of these transition teachers and I began planning a workshop to take place at my university which would: provide a space for the transition teachers to reflect on their experiences in these new roles; gather data about these experiences which we felt could be of interest to local, national and international audiences; and offer opportunities for professional development through a mix of presentations and discussions covering up-to-date transition theory and research. A collaborative approach to learning about and then addressing problems of pressing concern for teachers draws on action research principles (Elliot, 1991). Recruitment to the study was opportunistic, and the sampling was strategy purposive (Patton, 2002), as these participants were selected based on their relevant job role and a motivation to engage.

These conversations with the transition teachers and knowledge of the literature informed three key research questions:

1. What do transition teachers see as being a positive primary-to-secondary-school transition?
2. What is their role and impact in promoting positive transitions?
3. What challenges do they face?

The *Positive Transition Workshop* took place on 16 June 2023 and was attended by 21 of the 23 transition teachers employed by this local authority. Also present was a senior manager from the third-sector organisation (who helped set up some of the activities), a member of staff from the university's school of education, and a teacher from another local authority. A leading academic in educational and life transitions, Prof. Jindal-Snape from the University of Dundee, joined the workshop online and spoke about her ongoing research and theory-building.

A number of participatory and creative methods on the day were used to collect data from participants relevant to the research questions (Table 1). As an 'icebreaker activity' participants were invited to bring with them an object that conveyed something about their experience of working as a 'transition teacher'. Their commentary was recorded, transcribed and later analysed. One of the advantages of this type of method is that it can elicit participants' insights on a theme or topic that might be hard to do through conversation alone (Willig, 2017). At the same event, participants then worked in small groups to create a collage in response to the question '*What does a positive transition look like?*'. Collage is a methodological tool in which participants are granted significant autonomy to intuitively choose, arrange, connect and reorder materials, images and text to reflect their opinions, feelings and/or concerns on a given topic (Wilson & Flicker, 2014). A volunteer from each group then spoke about the artwork they had produced. The final method of data collection involved an activity in which participants were asked to write on Post-it® notes their responses to three prompts: to identify an impact they were having in their roles as 'transition teachers', any issues they were experiencing, and what improvements they wanted to see.

Photographs were taken of the work produced, and audio recording was used selectively (e.g. when a group spokesperson fed back to the room). The transcribed material was read, then analysed using specialist software, NVivo. Braun and Clark (2006) propose a series of stages to the thematic analysis of qualitative data, including familiarization with the data, categorising into components through coding, identifying general themes, joining data to themes, and then committing through writing up.

Approval to carry out this study was obtained from the University of Edinburgh School of Social and Political Sciences Researc0h Ethics Committee. Further authorisation to gather and store data was obtained from the local authority where these teachers were employed. Written consent was secured from all participants present to audio-record discussions held within the wider group, and to take photographs of any work produced and use them in future publications. The names of participants are not used in this paper nor are their schools or local authority identified.

Table 1. Method Matrix

Activity	Details	Data Collection and Analysis
'Bring along an object that conveys something about what it is like to be a Transition Teacher'	Object elicitation exercise at start of workshop. All participants introduced themselves, and those who had brought in an object (N = 18) spoke about its significance.	Photographs taken of objects and participants' explanations as to what the object meant were recorded, transcribed and analysed.
'What does a positive transition look like?'	Art-based group work activity facilitated by the author as part of the collaborative event in June 2023. Participants (N=21) working in three groups of five and one of six, with magazines, pens/pencils and A3 paper, used collage to respond to the question. One spokesperson per group then talked about their work, which was displayed on the wall for others to see.	Photographs were taken of artwork produced and group feedback was audio-recorded using a digital device and then later transcribed. Thematic analysis of texts (i.e. transcriptions) aided by computer software (Nvivo 14).
'Impacts, issues and improvements'	Final data collection activity at June 2023 workshop, in which participants wrote on Post-it® notes, which they placed on A3 sheets of paper under three headings: impacts, issues, and improvements. Limited to two minutes per prompt. Afterwards, groups asked to put coloured stickers on any points that resonated for them.	Photographs taken of A3 sheets and then written up before being analysed thematically. Stickers were counted to indicate frequency of answers.

Source: Hume (2025).

3. Results

Comparing transitions to a river was a recurring metaphor within the data gathered at the workshop. However, the participants did not see the 'river of transition' as something dividing primary to secondary school (as per Barber, 1999). Here the river connected the two settings, and they, and the young people, were very much riding on it. As practitioners, this positioning brought both benefits and problems. I have adopted this metaphor of the 'river of transition' to structure the presentation and analysis of my findings with respect to the three research questions set out earlier in this paper: how transition teachers understand a positive transition, their job role and impact, and the issues that they feel help or hinder them to be effective.

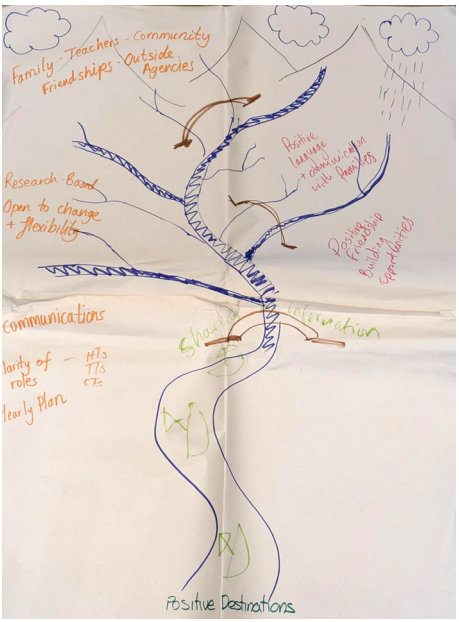
3.1. On the river of transition

The spokesperson from Group 1 explained that the large river they drew was where young people coming from different feeder schools all merge and move

together towards the shared destination of secondary school (Figure 1). They and their fellow 'transition teachers' were the boats. Along the way there are 'some stop-offs, key events, little harbours' that young people encountered, such as their orientation visit to the high school, which served to punctuate their journey. Having to go into or onto this river (i.e. to make the transition to secondary school) was deemed inevitable, but it could flow in different directions:

> There is this inevitable, and it is inevitable, move and this idea of it being a thread, this river that runs through it and actually starting off this communication, these links earlier on, that lead to much more positive destinations (…) and it leads off into other destinations.

Figure 1. Artwork by Group 1



Source: Hume (2025).

The word 'inevitable' also featured in Group 4's feedback. However, they included pictures of footwear in their work, explaining what these represented: 'We had shoes, all different, all going in different directions (…) treating everybody as individuals, everyone has different needs'. This observation that a positive experience of this transition could vary depending on the individual was also made by Group 2, who described different 'routes': 'Everyone is going to have their own way, their own journey, through this transition into high school.'

The importance of adopting a positive discourse around transitions was highlighted in other contributions to the workshop. In Group 2, their bright and colourful collage included images of a football team, young people smiling, cuttings from magazine with phrases such as 'good times' and 'The Hype of Right Now' (Figure 2). Their spokesperson added:

> But I suppose it's got to be positive for the children involved, it's got to be positive for everybody, hasn't it? But what stood out here was fun, jolly, because it has to be a positive experience.

Group 4 also used upbeat language in explaining their decisions to include a picture of champagne:

> Thinking about the language that we use when presenting this transition to them, it should be celebrated, you know, and it is daunting but being careful we don't focus on just that.

It was clear that these practitioners saw these transitions as something that should be positive for the young people involved, regardless of the route taken.

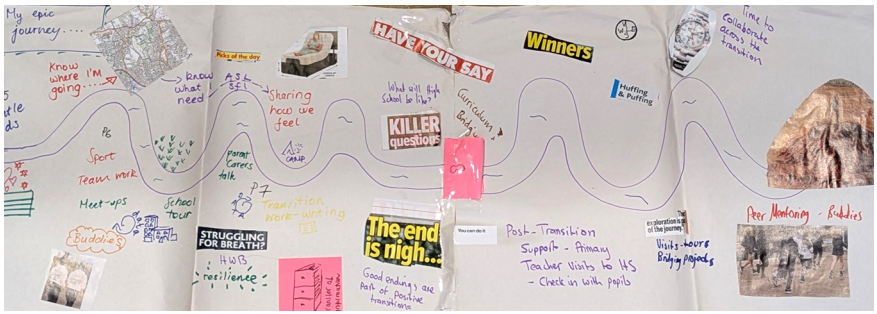
Figure 2. Artwork by Group 2

Source: Hume (2025).

Group 3, like Group 1, drew a river to depict the transition, and gave their piece the title: 'My Epic Journey' (Figure 3). They agreed that a positive transition starts early, suggesting Primary 5 (so over two years before moving school). They explained that a positive transition is one that is carefully mapped out in advance:

> This is a lovely map (…) so they know where they are going and from that the team and themselves know what they need, and you're looking at Additional Support for Learning if it is needed (…) everybody is inputting into that, everything planned out.

Figure 3. Artwork by Group 3



Source: Hume (2025).

Noting the presence of multiple stakeholders resonated in the work shared by Group 1, who included the words *family*, *teachers*, *outside agencies* and *community* on their collage. Likewise, Group 2 wrote *pupils*, *parents* and *staff*. However the quote above also points to a notable difference between Group 3 and the other groups regarding the extent to which the route of the river can be controlled and standardised. Group 1's comments hinted at uncertainty and various destinations, and Groups 2 and 4 both welcomed diversity in young people's journeys.

To summarise, the transition teachers understood a positive primary-to-secondary transition to be something largely planned and predictable. However, what was considered to be 'positive' might vary depending on the individual concerned. They added that young people's experiences can be shaped by past transitions, so support should begin early. Moreover, these transitions were recognised as being important to the young people and others around them, and should be a cause for celebration.

3.2. The river as enabling

By riding on this same 'river of transition', these practitioners felt they could get closer to the young people and better understand their needs on an individual and collective level. This familiarity and continuity in contact was an important benefit of their role (e.g. 'Pupils have a friendly face at High School (me!)'; 'Positive Relationships (familiar face)'; 'Being a familiar face (friendly) to help, especially in those first few weeks'). This special relationship and the detailed knowledge they built up about the young people was something their colleagues could not offer, with one participant arguing: 'I'm that adult that knows the learner'.

Second, by having the freedom to move between settings, they could become more cognisant of the diverse backgrounds and needs of young people across the whole cohort, not just individual schools or classes, thus promoting their inclusion (e.g. 'Looking at individual needs & if/what supports will be required at secondary so that they are already in place'; 'Getting to know all

Primary 7s in our learning community as learner and individuals'; 'Including everyone and considering all contexts').

Third, being on the river helped the transition teachers make links between the primary and secondary school, both in terms of educational practices and people. They described being able to introduce more consistency in curricular content, approaches to assessment and teaching methods within their learning communities (e.g. 'Sharing pedagogy in teaching literacy with high school staff in science and social subjects faculties to support attainment'; 'Cross-cluster moderation project – team teaching, collaborating with staff'; 'Developing bridging curriculum with English'). They had a positive impact on working relationships and feelings of trust between staff working in different schools (e.g. 'Bringing my primary & secondary colleagues closer together – cross-sector collaboration'; 'encouraging collaborative working + trust between settings'). Thus, these transition teachers appeared to be acting as agents of innovation, enhancing existing processes and practices around transition. Some of these efforts had been better received, such as improving targeted interventions so they were more effective (e.g. 'Developing the enhanced transition programme to cover various levels of enhanced support [e.g. in class, at secondary groups]'; 'Providing more opportunities for enhanced transition'; 'Raising confidence in literacy & numeracy'), starting pupils' preparation earlier and in a more sustained fashion (e.g. 'Pupils meeting each other over the year instead of just before moving on'; 'Plans in place for new Primary 6 event next session at the high school') and responding to the needs of pupils coming from outside the area (e.g. 'Making out-of-catchment pupils + parents feel welcomed + included through comms/tours/enhanced transition').

However, some transition teachers reported feeling they were 'swimming against the tide' when proposing changes, and encountered resistance from colleagues and managers. They reported that this could be due to a lack of understanding on the part of local authority education staff regarding the importance of transitions in respect of pupil attainment and wellbeing, or of other attitudinal or organisational factors (e.g. 'Inward looking schools – absence of community approach to transition'; 'Getting colleagues to 'buy in' to transition activities'; 'Working with 1 school that is so set in their ways – reluctant to make any changes').

3.3. The river as perilous

A downside to being on this river meant that sometimes these transition teachers felt they did not have a solid base, be that physically or professionally. Some referred to not having a room to work in or a laptop; one transition teacher described their job as 'nomadic. Moreover, they had to contend with frequent questions from managers and colleagues about their role and remit, who they worked with and what they did. Examples of this theme included: 'Miscommunication about the role and what it involves – so different schools and staff

have different expectations'; 'No clear remit from the council, which led to me saying yes to everything + taking too much on'; 'Some lack of communication in wishes of Head Teachers transferred to us'. This lack of understanding contributed to some transition teachers feeling overlooked or sidelined within existing networks, especially in terms of information-sharing. They reported: 'Not being copied into communication – feeling late in the 'what to know' or what's happening'; 'Role can be forgotten about so not always informed'; 'Staff forgetting to keep me in the loop (you don't know what you don't know)'. These participants shared that they felt their posts were under threat at council level, and this had a negative impact on their sense of wellbeing (e.g. 'The security of role – well-known in undermining our work + confidence'; 'Clarity of role across the city + stability of job').

This sense of being out of the loop and dealing with multiple demands was vividly illustrated when one participant talked about the juggling balls they brought in as their object:

> Often I don't get copied into emails either so I'll have teachers be like oh right you're happy to do this and I'll be like I don't know and they'll say this person said this but I've just not been included so you're just juggling the information all the time (…) juggling all the members of staff you're working with in every school, all the different policies, different ways of doing stuff, and you're just in it all.

A key challenge facing transition teachers was therefore trying to mediate different and sometimes competing expectations from their education partners at the local level (e.g. 'Balancing individual schools' priorities with learning community priorities + transitions agenda/focus'; 'Working between different teams that are not in sync, no shared vision'). The aggregate effect of this precarity and resistance are arrangements and attitudes within learning communities which left them feeling undervalued (e.g. 'Feeling nomadic and overwhelmed with role + no. of children'; 'Little say in job role + yearly planner'; 'Secondary Teachers don't seem to care!'), under-resourced (e.g. 'No laptop! My timetable being filled with other remits e.g. Pupil Support Assistant in class, Support for Learning jobs'; 'Not having a space – e.g. for teaching, storing resources') and professionally isolated (e.g. 'I am the only person providing 'curriculum-related transition' in the learning community'; 'Ideas and suggestions being disregarded').

4. Discussion

4.1. Transition ontology

These teachers saw the transition to secondary school as a river which could be enabling and perilous for the young people, and for themselves. Referring to the transition as being, or resembling, a river arguably originated with Barber (1999), but this potent imagery informs related metaphors such as bridges, which remain popular in the research literature (Galton et al., 1999;

Galton & McLellan, 2018; Dupont et al., 2023) and perhaps, as this study suggests, in practitioners' transition ontologies.

They conceptualised transition as being a fluid process rather than a one-off event, consistent with current scholarship (Jindal-Snape, 2016). Furthermore, the 'river of transition' was more often than not portrayed by participants as a predictable and linear phenomenon ('inevitable' was the word used). This way of seeing transition, emphasising its universality and unidirectionality, shares similarities with life course perspectives in which moving school would be a shared normative social-cultural experience, and part of a young person's longer-term trajectory (Elder, 1998). The prevalence of spatial metaphors in the research literature to depict the various transitions that young people experience, drawing on words like 'journey', 'stages' or 'progression', has been commented upon (Cuervo & Wyn, 2014; Downes, 2019). This practitioner-led characterisation would appear to contradict critical or post-modern theories of transition which emphasise their plurality and plasticity (see Hörschelmann, 2011).

Transitions were also to be celebrated. Thus, participants saw the move from primary to secondary school as a significant socio-cultural milestone, which appears aligned with a conceptualisation of these transitions as 'status passages' (Glaser & Strauss, 1971; Measor & Woods, 1984; Galton & McLellan, 2018). Indeed, the 'stop-offs, key events, little harbours' referred to by one group (which could be a leaving assembly at the end of primary school or orientation visits to secondary school) were markers of the young person's onward journey, akin to some of the 'rites of passage' ceremonies and rituals identified by social anthropologists (van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1969) and applied to education research (Pratt & George, 2005; Curson et al., 2019). Moreover, the message that there should be a positive discourse around these transitions chimes with current policy and practice recommendations (Jindal-Snape et al., 2021). That 'everybody' is entitled to a positive experience is an interesting insight and is consistent with Jindal-Snape's (2016) Multiple and Multi-Dimensional Transition Theory (MMT) i.e. that other groups in the young person's social world, ranging from family, friends and professionals, are invested in, and impacted by, their educational and life transitions. However, one possible corollary of conceptualising these transitions in this more diffused manner is that we possibly lose sight of their specific social and cultural significance for the young people.

4.2. Meeting young people's educational and social needs

The transitions teachers enjoyed a greater degree of physical – and professional – fluidity within and across local education networks and systems compared to colleagues confined to their classrooms. As a direct result, they could lead on or contribute to a number of initiatives which fostered closer collaboration between staff in primary and secondary schools. This included setting up moderation projects around assessment and running groups with learners

in several schools on a shared priority (such as literacy). By being a conduit for better communication between staff horizontally and vertically, these 'transition teachers' are addressing barriers to young people's attainment and inclusion identified in recent reports and reviews in Scotland (e.g. Scottish Government 2023a, 2023b).

4.3. Leadership and resourcing

However, being on this river was problematic for transition teachers, as it denied them a secure base, made their role harder to define and defend, and sometimes left them 'drowning' in multiple and competing demands from colleagues and leaders. A major area of dissatisfaction was how managers and colleagues in certain learning communities did not make them feel included, failing to copy them into emails and not informing them of meetings.

4.4. Professional identity

The downside of being on the river was a sense of personal and professional precariousness. Their own transitions into these jobs often entailed 'unbecoming' their previous teacher identity, and navigating new and often messier and murkier roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, their feelings of loss and regret appeared to be compounded by a lack of connectedness to other staff doing the same jobs in the other learning communities across the city, the absence of any induction programme, or of a clear line management structure that could be called on for guidance and resolving issues. Perennial conversations around budget cuts and claims circulating in the local media that their roles were at risk were cited as affecting morale and motivation. This study also suggests that because their contribution differs from what some might term the 'traditional' teaching and assessment that happens in primary and secondary schools, it is harder to identify and quantify. This can mean the work they do is framed as being non-essential or in some way supplementary and thus dispensable. Moreover, the effectiveness of transition practices is unlikely to improve if the staff entrusted with supporting our most in-need and at-risk learners feel unsupported and undervalued.

5. Conclusion

The move from primary to secondary school is a significant educational and life transition that takes place every year across the world (Jindal-Snape, 2016). The minority of young people in Scotland who report having a negative experience of this process will come from more disadvantaged backgrounds or have some form of additional support need (Gilbert et al., 2021), and this is consistent with research from other countries (Jindal-Snape et al., 2021). Moreover, these negative experiences can lead to poorer attainment and reduced wellbeing in later years (West et al., 2010). Knowing this, the work of those

practitioners whose role includes supporting young people before, during and/or after their move to secondary school is vitally important. This study sought to add to our knowledge of this work and help inform improvements in how practitioners support young people – and each other – during the transition process.

Through using a variety of creative and participatory research methods, 21 transition teachers from one Scottish local authority shared their knowledge and experience in these roles. Their conceptualisation of a positive transition was that it was something largely normative and linear, involving various actors, and celebratory. A recurring metaphor was that the primary to secondary transition was akin to a river. Using this metaphor to reflect further on the data, it would appear that their own positioning in this river was both enabling and problematic. They appeared to enjoy more freedom of movement within local education networks and systems compared to colleagues working in more traditional teacher roles. This helped them 'traverse' this river and act as a conduit for more effective collaboration between staff in different schools and tiers. Furthermore, by being able to travel on the 'river of transition' with the young people, they were in a position to build close connections with them during a process of educational and life change.

Entering these new and unusual education posts, meant for many of these participants leaving behind more traditional teaching jobs. This could generate feelings of excitement and also regret. How these practitioners were navigating changes in their professional identity, from something that felt familiar and fixed to something loose and liminal suggests their lived experience of transition was that it was both a process of 'becoming' but also 'unbecoming'. It would seem that these transitions teachers were both relishing the freedom and scope for improvisation these new roles provided, but equally resenting the poorly defined parameters and absence of dependable leaders, supportive colleagues or indeed a secure future. Thus the effectiveness of transition support practices in our schools is unlikely to improve if the staff entrusted with working with our most in-need and at-risk learners themselves feel misunderstood and marginalised.

There are other aspects of the 'river of transition' that were not explicitly addressed in this study but require further exploration. Though these teachers appeared to be motivated and skilled in developing relationships with the young people, and in promoting closer links across staff groups, there was very limited evidence as to how families were being engaged. Finding ways to positively involve parents and/or carers and other significant others in planning and implementing support for young people is a proven approach to improving transition experiences (Jindal-Snape et al., 2019). Moreover, policy developments 'upstream' in this river, not just in education but in welfare and housing, can affect the 'water quality': consider, for example, the enduring 'attainment gap' in Scottish society, whereby learners from more disadvantaged backgrounds underperform in school compared to those from wealthier households, which appears to be the legacy of years of fiscal austerity and failures to

address social inequality (Mowat, 2018). These social facts pollute the river, arguably turning negative transitions for young people into downward trajectories, as they endure scripts of disaffection and disillusionment with the education system.

This was evidently a small-scale qualitative study carried out in just one location. Moreover, inferences about the impact of transition teacher practices were based solely on participants' views, not other, arguably more independent, sources of data. Future research could explore these issues in more depth by speaking to other stakeholders about the transition teachers, such as young people they have worked with, parents or carers, and other educational staff. This would bring a level of triangulation, enhancing the rigour and relevance of the research. Impact could also be measured by looking at changes in wellbeing, attendance or attainments at certain time points for a target population. The use of a control group would not be ethically defensible given the implications of denying transition support to young people in evident need. How practitioners' own transition ontologies might influence their orientation to practice in this field appears worthy of further research.

My emerging findings suggested that as part of the process of moving into these new and relatively novel transition teacher posts, practitioners are seeking a viable professional identity in which to invest themselves, and project to others. This has relevance to other situations in which practitioners undertake transitions which change their roles and responsibilities, whether planned or otherwise. These insights can inform how training and support might be better planned for practitioners in other contexts who are 'transition workers'. This could be in the third-sector, in health settings or in social work services. One approach advocated in this paper is the organisation of a collaborative workshop involving university researchers and practitioners. These can promote the exchange of practical and theoretical knowledge, add to a sense of shared professional identity, and also enrich our collective understanding of transitions and transition practices.

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