READY OR NOT
LISTO O NO
PRONTO OU NÃO

Phill Gittins[1], Hilary Fabian

Glyndŵr University

(formally North East Wales Insititue for Higher Education)

ABSTRACT

This study is a result of my interest into what factors affect transition. This study explores the experiences and transition process of an adult with a statement of special educational needs (SEN), prior to leaving the residential Further Education (FE) College. Current literature seems to be rich in terms of transition at the early years and secondary school stage, yet not so rich in terms of transition from FE into employment, training or further education. This small scale study highlights and examines insight into a student with SEN's perception of his transition (who shall be called 'The Transitioner') and aims to identify what factors were particularly helpful in facilitating successful transitions. Research was conducted using a 19 year old male, who currently resides in Shropshire at a residential college for people with learning difficulties/disabilities. The design was qualitative, using a semi-structured interview, based on pre-determined questions which were developed through consultation with other practitioners working in the field of transition. Several key suggestions for developments in practice are justified within the paper and a final section on the implications of the research makes further recommendations.

Keywords: Transition, transition planning, special educational needs, college, support, person centred planning

---

[1] phillg2007@hotmail.co.uk . Youth & Community Practitioner, Teacher/Trainer, and Therapist with extensive project management, leadership, consultation and research experience. Specialisation includes: mentoring, one-to-one and group work within formal, informal and therapeutic learning environments. Experience of working within Government, Non-Government Organisations (NGO's), Education, Social care (children/adults), Private, Public, and Voluntary sectors (community projects).

Phill Gittins, Hilary Fabian

RESUMEN

Este estudio es el resultado de mi interés en los factores que afectan la transición educativa. Explora las experiencias y el proceso de transición de un adulto con necesidades educativas especiales (NEE), antes de salir de la zona residencial de Educación Superior. La literatura actual es rica en términos de transición en los primeros años y la etapa de secundaria, pero no en la transición de la Educación Superior al empleo. Esto se pone de relieve en el estudio a pequeña escala y examina la concepción que posee un alumno con necesidades educativas especiales sobre la transición y tiene como objetivo identificar los factores que sirvieron para facilitar las transiciones exitosas. La investigación se realizó con un varón de 19 años, actualmente reside en Shropshire en un colegio residencial para personas con dificultades de aprendizaje. El diseño fue de tipo cualitativo, mediante una entrevista semi-estructurada, a partir de preguntas predeterminadas que se desarrollaron a través de consultas con otros profesionales que trabajan en el campo de la transición. Se plantean sugerencias para la puesta en práctica del proceso de transición y se presenta una sección final sobre las consecuencias de la investigación, se hacen algunas recomendaciones finales sobre el plan de transición.
Palabras clave: Transición, planificación de la transición, necesidades educativas especiales, universidad, la planificación centrada en la persona.

RESUMO

Este estudo é o resultado de meu interesse nos fatores que afetam a transição educacional. Explorar as experiências ea transição de um adulto com necessidades educativas especiais (NEE), antes de deixar a zona residencial de Ensino Superior. A literatura atual é rica em termos de transição nos primeiros anos e de nível secundário, mas não na transição do ensino superior para o emprego. Esta é destaque no estudo de pequena escala que examina o conceito e tem um aluno com necessidades educativas especiais sobre a transição e tem como objetivo identificar os fatores que serviram para facilitar as transições bem-sucedidas. A investigação foi realizada com um macho de 19 anos, atualmente residindo em Shropshire em um colégio residencial para pessoas com dificuldades de aprendizagem. O projeto foi qualitativa, utilizando entrevista semi-estruturada, com base em perguntas pré-determinadas que foram desenvolvidos através

de consultas com outros profissionais que trabalham na área de transição. Oferecendo sugestões para a implementação do processo de transição e apresenta uma seção final sobre as implicações da pesquisa, faz algumas recomendações finais sobre o plano de transição.

Palavras-chave: transição, o planejamento de transição, educação especial, da universidade, centrada na pessoa de planejamento.

INTRODUCTION

This paper will explore what factors affect transition. Originally the intention was to examine the entire transition process - including when the student first starts at the college, their journey throughout their time at the college and finally his transition to the next phase. However, on further inspection this appeared to be relatively too complex for the scope of this project and also deviated somewhat from my personal research preferences. It has proved challenging to continually focus the scope of the project on the research question at hand. It became evident that the main area of interest was the perceptions held by the transitioner concerning how supported they felt during their transition.

The defining aspect and the focus of this project was to investigate the extent to which the transitioner felt ready to make the transition.

Potentially, there are two possible outcomes from this research, which are as follows:

The transitioner did feel he was ready to make the transition to the next phase.
The transitioner did not feel he was ready to make the transition to the next phase.
In both of the above cases, this research intends to explore what factors affect transition, and what barriers, if any prevent people from making successful transitions.

Why did I choose this subject?

Having worked with a wide variety of people over the years in a number of informal, formal and therapeutic learning environments, my work is of direct relevance to the research topic. I also benefit from a network of contacts that also have a professional

interest into what factors affect transitions. be it moving school, moving to another location, or settling in within a community.

Therefore, it is a combination of the above which have stimulated my interest in this area and I aim to use this research evidence to help enhance my future practice as a teacher, youth worker and a counsellor.

Context

The college:

The institution is a specialist post-compulsory residential Further Education (FE) college, for students with a wide variety of learning difficulties/disabilities. There are roughly 250 students who come from all over the United Kingdom. The starting age ranges from 16 to 19 years and the college offers vocational courses for 3 years. The college has been given official recognition as a 'shining example of a learning organisation', Beacon status and OFSTED inspection results classified the college as 'outstanding'. The college's mission statement is 'To promote, through inclusive learning, the vocational, educational, personal and social development of young people with a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities'.

The college has a medical centre, which is staffed 24 hours a day. Staff who sleep over are available for a crisis during the night. The accommodation comprises shared or single rooms with a duty officer on campus and 3 care staff.

The curriculum is divided into subjects that are part of the core curriculum such as Basic Skills and vocational training (horticulture, practical skills, textiles and design, retail, catering, hospitality and house keeping).

The extended curriculum includes subjects such as independent living skills, performing arts, personal development, physiotherapy, speech & language therapy and sports & leisure activities. This part of the curriculum is aimed at supporting and enabling students in their journey towards independence.

One of the first processes a student will encounter when arriving at the college is visiting the Assessment Department. An element of the assessment department includes the pre-entry assessment of applicants to the college. The pre-entry assessment determines whether the college can provide for the students needs and serves as a guide for the admissions staff. The type of information collated on the profile includes information about the student's health, behaviour, learning needs, their interests, work experience, and educational history (See appendix 9).

Once a student is admitted to the college they under go an assessment term, in which they are assessed for their social skills (communication skills) and educational levels (literacy, numeracy). The student also has the opportunity to assess the courses they want to follow at college by experiencing the various core and extended curriculum areas and seeing what they like best.

The assessment process supports the learning of the student by assessing their needs and this information is used to ensure that the student's timetable matches these needs. The assessment department makes this information accessible to all staff that support or teach them. This information is provided in the form of the `Baseline Assessment Profile' (BAP), which is used to inform staff for the rest of the student's time at college. The students are allocated a named member of care staff (to oversee their accommodation and care needs) a Counsellor (who they can go to if they have any personal problems) and a Personal Tutor, whose role it is to monitor and support the student with their learning. The Personal Tutor will draw up an Individual Learning Programme (ILP) (See Appendix 10) for the student that aims to prepare the student for their planned destination upon leaving college. This ILP would include selecting appropriate 'Individual Learning Goals (ILG's) (See Appendix 10) corresponding to each curriculum area giving them a focus for the student's progression towards transition.

The 'Transition Programme' commences the day a learner enters the college, a series of documentation is maintained following the progression towards the identified - `planned destination' and set ILG's to lead to the ultimate leaving date and entry into the community. The personal tutor selects ILG's goals for literacy, numeracy, independent living skills, personal development, and vocational skills. Appropriate goals are

selected through collaboration with the student and choices are informed by information provided by the assessment department after their first term.

The individual time table of the student is itself a personalised learning programme designed to meet the student's learning needs and should enable progression (throughout the three years the student is in college) for the student to achieve their ILG's set at the start of their time at college and is updated as necessary.

The college keeps in touch with parents (as required) but this is enhanced with the designated personal tutor and personal counsellor - who get to know their learners very well. Tutorial files contain a 'transition' and 'milestones' document's set out to "track" the learner's progress.

The Transition Review, (See Appendix 11) which usually takes place during the penultimate term and should ideally be attended by the Parents; identified local (to home) social worker and a Connexions representative (sometimes a reciprocal arrangement maybe in force with Shropshire Connexions) anyone that may have a useful input - e.g. Community Nurses/Living. Ideally before the allocated Transition Review - we recommend that as a claim for further (3rd year) funding a copy of the reports will be sent to all parties, this is an ideal time for families to make contact with Social Services to establish a named person to support the learner. The Transition meeting is aimed at "what comes next" and wherever possible we aim to obtain the view from all participants who maybe able to aid a smooth transition from college to further education, employment or training.

The Respondent:

For reasons of confidentiality, the respondent will not be named. I initially worked with the respondent when I first started at the college in September 2007. The respondent is a sociable, amenable young man, who has an extraordinary ability to develop strategies to cope with all that life brings. He is a flexible and adaptable person.

He is 19 years old and was born on the 10th April 1989. He is from Hereford, has two older and one younger bother. His family is close and supportive with a background in game keeping.

He has moderate to severe learning difficulties/disabilities with Aperts syndrome and moderate hearing loss. He has recently undergone craniofacial surgery to reconstruct his forehead.

Organisation

This paper is divided into six sections, the first outlines the project, the second (literature review), explores contemporary definitions and information regarding learning difficulties/disabilities, SEN, person centred planning, transition planning and transition. Three on methodology, four on findings and a fifth called discussion, which interprets and evaluates the findings. Finally a conclusions section where I have used the five former sections to come to a conclusion as to what factors affect transition. Areas for further research are also identified and stated in this last section.

Learning Difficulty/Disability

The educational term `Learning Difficulty' covers mild, moderate, severe and specific learning difficulties. The 1993 Education Act states that a child has a learning difficulty if he or he; "has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age. Or has a disability, which either prevents or hinders the child from making use of the educational facilities of a kind provided for children in the same age schools within the area of the LEA" (Section 156). The World Health Organisation defines learning disabilities as "a state of arrested or incomplete development of mind' that may also have `significant impairment of intellectual functioning and significant impairment of adaptive/social functioning'". The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) defines disability as "A physical or mental impairment which has a substantial long-term adverse effect on her/her ability to carry out normal day to day activities" (Section 1).

Measuring learning difficulties/disabilities

According to the Prime Minister's Strategy Report (2005), "The costs of raising a disabled child are estimated to be three times greater than those for raising a non-disabled child, and the costs increase as young people get older" (p. 140). 86% felt it was harder for disabled people to find work, and 30% expected, by age 30, to be earning less than other people their age and 60% of disabled young people who did not enter further or higher education said they believed they would not have got the support they needed (Joint consultation response from Every Disabled Child Matters and the Council for Disabled Children).

Special education needs (sen)

The term SEN may be defined as "A young person or adult has a special education need if s/he has a requirement which makes it necessary for educational provision to be made which is either additional to or different from that generally provided" and may include people who have a "physical disabilities, sensory impairments, medical conditions, emotional/behavioural difficulties, mental illness and learning difficulties, including those arising from linguistic, social and cultural differences" (Thomas, 2003).

Tomlinson (1996) wrote that institutions working with people who are statemented with SEN's should strive to "avoid a view point which locates the difficulty or deficit with the student, and focus instead on the capacity of the educational institution to understand and respond to the individual learner's requirement. This means we must move away from labeling the student and towards creating an appropriate educational environment; concentrate on understanding better how people learn so that they can better be helped to learn; and see people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties first and foremost as learners* (Tomlinson, 1996, p. 4). Tomlinson's (1996) report had a positive effect on the way in which educational institutions cater for students with disabilities and in connection with other reports and initiatives i.e. Kennedy's (1997) report brought about a cultural shift in learning, that focused on `widening participation' and access to Further Education, for all students.

Person centred planning

In response to Tomlinson's (1996) report, a new approach to planning (person centred planning) was introduced to further promote the principles of inclusion and widening participation. According to Lenehan (2004) "Person centred planning is a process for continual listening and learning, focused on what is important to someone now and for the future, and acting upon this in alliance with family and friends. Person centred planning is a process of life planning for individuals, based around the principles of inclusion and the social model of disability", which strives to ensure "the focus person is central and in control"

*www.circlesnetwork.org.uk/what_is_person_centred_planning.htm). According to Rogers (1967) being `person centred' is about valuing and focusing ones attention to find out what is important to a person from their own perspective, where facilitators are concerned with individuals being aware of their learning needs and taking steps towards fulfilling those needs and their further personal development. Person centred planning is about enabling people with SEN's to be at the centre of the decision making process i.e. 'what would you like to do? And how?', instead of a more authoritarian way of working i.e. 'this is what we have decided you will do'. These objectives of autonomy and decision making were set out in the `Valuing People' White Paper (2001), which was a follow up of the last White paper `Better Standards for the Mentally Handicapped' from 30 years ago. It recognised that `people with learning disabilities and/or difficulties are amongst the most vulnerable and socially excluded in our society' (p. 2) and therefore set out ways in which the Government could initiate changes in services and expenditure to "enable people with learning disabilities to have their voices heard and have wider opportunities for a fulfilling life as part of the local community" (p. 13). The Government's `New Vision' proposed in the Paper, is based on four key principles; rights, independence, choice and inclusion and planned to implement these change using the four key principles which were: `Partnership Working', the promotion of holistic services, through partnership working of relevant local agencies involved in working for people with learning disabilities. These services and agencies being; housing, health, employment, care, education and transport. In 2007 'Growing up matters' was introduced as a new approach to transition planning for young people with SEN's.

Transition planning

Transition planning is a partnership involving the individual with SEN's, their family, local service providers, school personnel and government staff who support youth transitioning to adulthood. According to the SEN Code of Practice (2001) "A Transition Plan should draw together information from a range of individuals within and beyond school in order to plan coherently for the young person's transition to adult life'. The SEN Code of Practice (2001) states that "the views of young people themselves must be sought and recorded wherever possible in any assessment, reassessment or review during the years of transition" (p. 131).

Transition

Definitions of a transition can be characterised as:

""A phase of intensified and accelerated developmental demands that are socially regulated." (Fthenakis, 1998)

"In reality it means leaving 'the comfort zone' and encountering the unknown; a new culture, place, people, roles, rules and identity." (Fabian, 2002, p. 7)

In terms of SEN's and transition, Levinson (1998), defines transition as the process of facilitating the post school adjustment of students, particularly students with disabilities. Levinsons (1998) writes that this adjustment may include work, leisure, and independent functioning in the community. Furthermore, DeFur (1999) states that "transition refers to a change in status from behaving primarily as a student to assuming emergent adult roles. These roles include employment, participating in post-secondary education, maintaining a home, becoming appropriately involved in the community, and experiencing satisfactory personal and social relationships" (the DCDT Position on Transition, Halpern, 1994). In the context of this study, transition marks the end of one phase of learning and the beginning of another (Transition Review Group, 2003).

Growing up matters (2007) 'better transition planning for people with complex needs', a report from the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), identified that although

there is evidence of exceptional work by institutions working with people who have learning difficulties/disabilities during the transition stage, there is still "inadequate commissioning of services, poor co-ordination and a failure to properly plan ahead with young people and their families. This results in delays, multiple assessments, confusion and anxiety for all concerned" (Growing up matters, 2007, p. 6). According to the Children's NSF standard on transition "Young people's health often declines at transition" (p. 134) and therefore services working with people during the transition stages need to consider both the physical and emotional needs of the transitioner.

According to Fabian (2007) there are five common themes of transitions - which are effective communication, healthy relationships, emotional well-being, belonging/participation and learning processes.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) writes that effective communication is about "transmitting messages from one setting to the other with the express intent of providing specific information to persons in the other setting. The communication can occur in a variety of ways, directly through face-to-face interaction, telephone conversations, correspondence and other written messages, notices or announcements, or indirectly via chains in the social network" (p. 210). According to Fabian (2007) "better communication between the school … (partner agencies) … and the family" before the transition takes place "has been found to foster effective transition" (p. 23). Effective communication would involve all partner agencies i.e. Social Services, Connexions, Job Centre Plus and Educational Institutions engaging collaboratively to work out the best way of meeting the needs of the person during their transition (person centred planning).

Maslow (1954) writes that in order for a person to have their needs fully met, they must first of all possess certain favourable pre-conditions, such as air, food, drink, shelter, warmth and sleep – 'lower order needs'. Once these are achieved human beings are able to progress onto 'higher order needs' which include a K*** sense of love/belonging, high self esteem, dependant on own experiences and judgment, not being so susceptible to social pressures, socially compassionate, accepting others as they are and not trying to change people, comfortable with oneself, spontaneous and natural, creative, inventive and original. The ability to be socially compassionate and

accept others for how they are, increases self esteem and links to one of the common themes of successful transitions in that people who develop healthy relationships are more likely to undergo a successful transition than those who do not develop healthy relationships.

Abraham Maslow (1954) in collaboration with Carl Rogers (1902 - 1987) believed that all human beings are capable of achieving their full potential and becoming what Rogers (1967) called a 'fully functioning' person. Rogers (1967) states that in order for a person to become a 'fully functioning person' they must have their physical needs met (Maslow, 1954), as well as their emotional needs. In terms of transitions, Roger's (1967) would argue that the emotional well-being of the transitioner is massively important and services working with this person should strive to monitor this and promote better emotional well-being. Maintaining emotional well-being and becoming a fully functioning person is dependent upon a person possessing certain favourable conditions. Roger's (1967) believed that there are three key concepts, which provide a climate conducive to growth and personal change, which Rogers (1967) named his 'core conditions'.

These three core conditions are 'Empathy', 'Unconditional Positive Regard' and 'Congruency'. A person who is congruent "will admit that they do not, perhaps understand a situation, or that they can be wrong about what the … (person)… is feeling, but this very openness can make the … (person)… begin to accept himself. Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR) can be defined as an attitude or approach to human beings and is about being totally accepting and non-judgemental towards people, regardless of values, beliefs and behaviours. "The … (person)… who holds this attitude deeply values the humanity of … (the person)… and is not deflected in that valuing by any particular behaviour". According to Mearns & Thorne (2006, p. 52) "Empathy is a continuing process, and a quality rather than a skill, whereby the …(listener)… lays aside their own way of experiencing and perceiving reality, preferring to sense and respond to the experiences and perceptions of their client". Empathy is the ability to have one foot in your client's world and one foot in your own world and is important in the relationship because to be understood or even listened to, may be at very least a rare if not a unique experience. At this point it is important to mention that effective communication of these core conditions has an impact upon the outcomes, where

"actions speak louder than words' and 'it's not what you say, it's the way that you say it" (Curzon, 1997, p. 146).

In line with Maslow's (1954) 'Hierarchy of Needs', Bruner (1996) also acknowledges the fact that that a sense of belonging is an important factor of human development and therefore can help to inform successful transitions. Bruner (1996) writes that "by taking part in the life of the … (institution)… and having opportunities to deal with the culture of the … (institution) …, children construct their own realities and meanings then adapt them to the system, and acquire the … (institutions) … ways of perceiving, thinking and feeling, and carrying out discourse" (Bruner, 1996, p. 11). Deal and Kennedy (1999) write that "strongly held and consistently practiced beliefs give culture its power to raise human expectations and performance to truly extraordinary levels. Without such values and beliefs, any attempts of manipulating culture will fail" (p. 211).

Transitions are "characterized by phases of learning and accelerated learning in a social context" (Fabian, 2007, p. 23). This development could involve learning about the culture of the environment i.e. what it feels (Bruner, 1979), the physical environment (Maslow, 1954), or learning about oneself and others (Gardener, 2001). Learning about oneself and others fits into Gardener's (2001, p. 32), 'Multiple Intelligence Theory' (MIT) of 'Interpersonal Intelligence; which is "concerned with the capacity to understand others", whereas 'Intrapersonal Intelligence' is the capacity to "reflect upon one's self, to appreciate one's feelings, fears and motivations". Gardeners (2001) theory of interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence is also in line Rogers (1967) concept of empathy, in that it s concerned with empathically understanding the feelings and thoughts of oneself and others. A person who has the opportunity and capacity to be empathic and reflect analytically is in line with Blooms (1956) 'Taxonomy of Educational Objectives' where learners are not just simply 'recalling', 'comprehending' or 'applying' (surface learning) their own thoughts and feelings, but they have the ability to analyse, synthesize and evaluate (deeper learning).

CONCLUTION

This literature review has provided some context to the further discussion of learning difficulties/disabilities, SEN and transition. One important finding from this review was

the high number of young people (60%) (Prime Minister's Strategy Report, 2005) who did not feel they would get the support they needed when attending college. Another important finding was the fact that "young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities aged 16 are twice as likely not to be in education, employment or training (NEET) as their peers, and by aged 19, three times as likely" (The White Paper 'Valuing People', 2001, p. 1). These two key findings alone, clearly suggest that policy makers and institutions working with people during this important stage are still continuing to fall somewhat short and not adequately addressing the needs of people with learning difficulties/disabilities during the transition process.

Although this review has been useful in accessing a broad range of information related to learning difficulties/disabilities, SEN and transition, the lack of research into students with SEN at the transition stage of leaving college to gain employment, education or training strongly suggests the need for more specific research into this area. Despite the increased focus on transition, "there has been relatively little mention of mainstreaming the requirements of disabled young people. It will be important that this omission is addressed as future policy is developed. (Prime Minister's Strategy Report, 2005, p. 131).

METHODOLOGY

Having outlined the key research considerations in section two, this section will discuss the design of my research, including the reasons for having chosen this particular research strategy and methodology. The strengths of this approach are outlined and the unavoidable constraints imposed by the design are noted.

Research strategy

Action research was selected as the main approach to the study. The reason for this is that there are a variety of relevant aspects to this approach which lend themselves to the research at hand: For example;

Action research "involves participation in the research for practitioners. This can allow for a democratic approach in the research process, depending on the nature of the

partnership, and generally involves a greater appreciation of, and respect for, practitioner knowledge" (Denscombe, 2005, p.81).

Action research "has a personal benefit for the practitioner, as it contributes to professional self-development" (ibid: 81).

The aim of action research "is to arrive at recommendations for good practice that will tackle a problem or enhance the performance of the organisation and individuals through changes to the rules and procedures within which they operate" (Bell, 2005, p.8)

The characteristic strength of action research is that "it is driven by the need to solve practical, real world problems" (Denscombe, 2005, p.74). Essentially, it allows deeper analysis into the complexities and interrelations of a given situation, which is not always straightforward when utilising this types of research strategy, such as surveys. Action research also allows the researcher to use a variety of sources, a variety of data, and a variety of research methods.

One of the weaknesses associated with action research is that "the nature of the research is constrained by what is permissible and ethical within the workplace setting" (ibid: 82). One of "the distinct ethical problems for action research is that, although the research centres on the activity of the practitioner, it is almost inevitable that the activity of colleagues will come under the microscope at some stage or other, as their activity interlinks with that of the practitioner who instigates the research" (ibid: 79). Action researchers are often regarded as being "unlikely to be detached and impartial in his or her approach to the research" (ibid: 82).

Research methods

The main research method to be utilised is a semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews (and unstructured interviews) engender "objective discovery rather than checking" (Denscombe, 1998, p. 113). There are also other reasons for choosing a semi-structured interview there is are a variety of relevant aspects to this approach which lend themselves to the research at hand, for example:

An interview is most productive as the "researcher is likely to gain valuable insight based on the depth of the information gathered and the wisdom of 'key information'." (Denscombe, 2005, p. 190).

An interview "can be a rewarding experience for the informant. Compared with questionnaires, observation and experiments, there is a more personal element to the method, and people tend to enjoy the rather rare chance to talk about their ideas at length to a person who whose purpose is to listen and note the ideas without being critical" (ibid: 190).

When asked the questions which were set out in the interview, the respondent related the themes set out in the questions back to his previous experiences of transitions. In doing this, the respondent was able to consider what factors affected his transition then, and as a result consider what factors may affect his transition from FE into education, employment or training.

The aim of the first questions was to establish how the transitioner went about deciding upon his next steps after leaving college. Question 2 explored how involved the transitioner felt within the decision making process and how much autonomy he felt they had with regards to the decisions being made regarding their transition. Question 3 identified what advice, information and guidance the student had been provided with prior to their transition to the next phase. Question 4 gave insight into the perceived level of support being provided during the transition process. Question 5 considered current practice and aimed to identify how the service could be improved. Question 6 clarifies the extent to which the student feels ready to embark upon the next phase. Questions 7 allowed for further exploration if need be.

The semi-structured interview with the transitioner (See Appendix 1) took twenty minutes, whilst the interviews with the TC (See Appendix 2) and PT (See Appendix 3) took between thirty to forty minutes.

The research was guided very loosely to some extent by the frameworks of both the Life-Long Learning U.K (LLUK), Every Child Matters (ECM): Change for Children (2005) and the college Transition Policy. Subjects of a sensitive nature will be dealt

with ethically and within the professional code of ethics, which requires the protection of personal privacy and confidentiality at all times.

Types of data and analysis

I have used qualitative data to generate my evidence. As a consequence of my research being mainly qualitative, the analysis of the data will be mainly based on interpretative methods rather than on statistical analysis. A substantial amount of time needed to be set aside for transcribing the video footage from the semi-structured interview with the respondent. After reading the interview data many times and attempting to identify meaningful groupings, the following themes were classified: -

Effective communication

Healthy relationships

Emotional well-being

Belonging / participation

Learning processes

Informal discussions with the Personal Tutor (PT) of the respondent (See Appendix 3) and the Transition Coordinator (Appendix 2) provided a useful means of triangulating the findings. The PT was asked the same questions as the transitioner. The reason for this was that the researcher wanted to gain specific insight into how well the PT thought the transitioner was supported and whether or not barriers, if any, prevented the transitioner from making a successful transition. The questions for the TC differed slightly to the questions the transitioner and PT were asked, as the researcher wanted to explore the college's commitment to transition. The aim was to investigate what effect external factors (funding, resources, family, support units) have on transitions.

It is not the primary intention of the research to fully investigate the technicalities and key concepts of transition, including the managerial and professional relationships/bureaucracies which inform transitions. The first stage however is to focus on identifying the perceptions held by the transitioner concerning his transition; discovering what factors affect his transition and the extent to which he felt ready to make the transition.

Findings

This section records the results from the findings of the research and identifies the main themes which emerge from the interview data.

Effective Communication:

A person centred and multi-agency approach to transitions was valued highly. It is important to note that effective communication should involve all agencies responsible for the well-being of the transitioner. These partner agencies have a responsibility for the welfare of the student and therefore should engage collaboratively and strive to promote the best level of service for the people with which they are working.

Healthy relationships:

Friends and the ability to speak to trust worthy/non-judgmental adults was viewed as being important, and helped to ease the transition process.

Emotional well-being:

The emotional needs of the transitioner were considered to be a priority and therefore another factor which affect transition.

Belonging / participation:

A sense of belonging and the thought of being valued and respected as an individual was important factor of the transition process.

Learning processes:

The opportunity to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes was an important element of transition. Acquiring qualifications in support of their work was also important.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this section is to analyse the findings in terms of the earlier literature review of trends. From the research data six key themes emerged as to what factors affect transition, these were effective communication, healthy relationships, emotional well-being, belonging / participation, learning processes, as well as resources/funding (external factors).

Analysis of findings

To answer the questions set out in the semi-structured interview, the respondent took a phenomenological view, reflecting on what factors affected his transition into college, thus enabling him to relate his past experiences to his process of transition to the next phase.

Samples from the interview material will be presented within each category. The following will discuss each key theme separately, the first being effective communication.

Effective communication:

The results of this study indicate that effective communication between all partner agencies working with the transitioner was an important factor to consider when facilitating transitions "Services need to work together to find out what people's needs are and to give them support (Growing up matters, 2007, p. 3).

"Well… I had a meeting with my parents and we decided I want to do a bit more on horticulture. My social worker, my personal tutor were there" (Respondent).

Reece & Walker (2006, p. 14), write that open consultation is an important part of personal development that enables transitioners "to see the various issues relevant to … (them and others) … and to express their own views (and misgivings)" (Fontana, 1995, p. 247).

"We do have on every 2 weeks a meeting on Thursday evening, an evening for them. A leaving meeting" (Respondent).

Addressing the needs of the transitioner "require(s) effective communication and collaboration between youths, parents, educators, service providers and others team members" (Transition Planning for Youths with Special Needs, 2006, p. 13).
"The Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) (See Appendix 5): made up of Social Workers, Connexions from Careers Wales and Job Centre are all involved with the transition process" (TC)

There was evidence to suggest that the healthy relationships the transitioner develops during their transition is important.

"Getting to know the place, meeting people, helped me settle in" (Respondent)
The data shows that the transitioner valued the support received, from both the staff and his fellow peers.

"the care staff were great, they helped support me in, and I made friends" (Respondent). The development of healthy relationships helps to influence the transition process in a positive way. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) "groups … (and) …/or individuals will influence a degree of change on each other".

Emotional well-being:

Results imply that the emotional well-being of the transitioner is a priority.

"Definitely staff help to make students feel more comfortable and prepare students for their transition" (TC)

Roger's (1957) core conditions (empathy, congruency and unconditional positive regard) were identified as being fundamental to the process of transitions.

"There we discuss what are feelings are about leaving college. It's for all students who are due to leave at Christmas" (Respondent).

Through discussing the transition to the next phase, transitioners are able to reflect upon their own personal feelings and thoughts, and in turn develop empathic understanding with regards to how others were feeling. According to Rogers (1967) the ability to empathise and relate to others is an important part of what it is to be human.

"Some people, I wouldn't agree with them, but they wouldn't want to talk about leaving so soon, as they have half the term left" (Respondent)

In line with Roger's (1967), core condition of unconditional positive regard, a non-judgemental environment and the opportunity to disclose personal feelings and thoughts, in the knowledge that transitioner's won't be judged, was important.

"But we have to talk about it. Otherwise we will be left in the dark really. They start in the last term before leaving. Twice is enough, as people are busy" (Respondent)

Belonging / participation:

The results confirm that a sense of belonging and the opportunity to participate in the decision making was rated highly.

"Well, um… everyone is saying to me good luck for your next college. They are cheering me on. They are supporting me this way. Well, after I leave I will probably be keeping in contact with quit a lot of people such as my personal tutor, and the horticulture staff" (Respondent).

According to Maslow (1954), a sense a belonging and love drives personal growth, and therefore is an important factor of transitions.

"Well, I get on with them, and they're the people I go to. And horticulture staff do a lot for me, that they don't necessarily do for other people. They give me special treatment. Yes they give me a good service" (Respondent)

The findings reveal that the transitioner felt valued.

"I'm sure quite a lot of staff will miss me. It's great being here; I'll probably surprise you guys by coming back in the next couple of years" (Respondent).

Learning processes:

It is clear that the transitioner's perception of himself has changed over his three years at college. I feel that in this point there is a need to go with Maykutt & Morehouse (1994) suggestion of allowing the research participants speak for themselves. It is clear from the data that the respondent's experiences over of the last three years have helped to better prepare him for his transition.

 "Well… I looked back the other day and said to myself. That's quite a lot of things I've done. It's all about improvements, what you can do next (Respondent).
"Yeah, I looked down from myself" (Respondent).

"When I first started I was nervous, I was home sick. Well… I dint want to leave home. A couple of weeks after I started I got used to college life, in JMC, Junior Middle Kitchen" (Respondent).

The data also shows that the opportunity to learn in a variety of contexts i.e. vocational, and personal development were an important factor.

"Well… I'm ready; I've completed my horticulture course, and woodwork course. And I'm ready for others courses to do. I'm ready in terms of care support. I will be interviewing my own personal care assistant" (Respondent).

"Confidence. Is probably about 100%" (Respondent).

Consultation with the TC and PT offered triangulation of the data, and as a result a sixth category was identified 'Resources/funding' (External factors).

Resources / funding (External Factors):

Information from the PT and the TC provides important evidence of the fact that external factors such as support networks outside the college and issues of location/funding are a priority.

"Some LEA's (local educational authorities) are definitely better than others" (PT)
Fabian (2007) writes that the "parents' positive attitude" (Fabian, 2007, p. 23) is an important factor that influences the transition process.

"It definitely helps: if the student, social services, parents and all other agencies involved have a clear idea of what the student wants to do: the next steps" (PT)

As well as various internal factors (effective communication) that influence transitions, external "Factors that contribute to this include different eligibility criteria for access to services and different levels of funding" (Growing up matters, 2007)

"The geographical area and the background of the student influence the transition process" (PT).

CONCLUTIONS

This paper, first explained the basis for this research project, outlined the academic literature pertinent to this study, considered research methodology approaches for the original study, identified the main results and analysed the various research findings. The following will firstly explore the strengths and limitations of this study, secondly the issues remaining, thirdly areas for future research, then points for further development, recommendations for future practice and further thoughts. The final part will comment on an analysis of the transition process and in particular the extent to which the transitioner is ready to make their transition to the next phase.

This research provides insight into the perceptions held by a student with SEN concerning their transition. There is evidence in this work to suggest a positive perception of transition and the findings conclude that the transitioner felt ready to make

their transition to the next phase. The researcher is aware that the transition process is influenced by many internal (within the educational institution) and external factors (funding, support structures, social services). Central to the outcomes of each transition is a "person centred perspective on planning", which includes effective communication and a multi-agency approach to working. Cambridge and Carnaby (2006) write that person centred planning is "a critical indicator of good practice".

Despite the positive outcomes evidenced in this research, comments such as 'some LEA's are definitely better than others' (PT) and 'what type of background the student has, is an important part of their transition' (PT) clearly suggests that "even though many people work hard to support young people into adult life, there is clearly not enough help for many young people with complex needs who live away from home" (Growing up matters, 2007, p. 11). The Disability Rights Commission (2007) reports that schools and educational establishments vary in their willingness and capacity to address and remove barriers to education for people with SEN's and learning difficulties/disabilities.

Strengths of the research

Utilising the research method of a semi-structured interview as a means for gathering evidence for this research enabled the researcher to gain qualitative responses and a wider range of data than perhaps a questionnaire would have. For the purposes of this small scale research project the decision to choose a semi-structured interview for generating the evidence proved to be methodologically sound, whereas the feedback received from all participants suggested that they found the questions set out in the semi-structured interview easy to answer.

Limitations of the research

Although the findings suggest that the respondent has a positive perception of his transition experience, the researcher does not feel as if the evidence supplied supports the researcher's perceptions and experience convincingly. There are a number of possibilities for this, which may relate to methodological or philosophical issues.

Methodological limitations:

The main advantages of selecting pre-determined questions for the semi-structured interview were that they provide a vast amount of research data at a relatively low cost in terms of resources, time and money. The questions were easy to arrange and the "data collected … (is)… very unlikely to be contaminated through variations in the wording of the questions or the manner in which the question is asked" (Denscombe, 2005, p. 159).

The main disadvantages of selecting a semi-structured interview with pre-determined questions were that the structure was formal. Essentially, questions were pre-coded which may have restricted dialogue, leaving more room for the researcher to interpret a structure beneficial to them and their research, rather than that of the respondent. To compensate for this, a final question was added to allow participants to make any further comments and ask any questions.

In consideration of the methodology and the use of a semi-structured interview with pre-determined questions, the respondent may have distorted the truth through several possibilities. The list of possible reasons for this may include faking knowledge, defensiveness, repressive coping style, inflated self perception, denial, boredom, humor and flippant comments that have no meaning to the respondent (http://www.stetson.edu/~bboozer/Survivor/day27.html).

Due to the above reasons, the research becomes very difficult to put into any definitive order, and some of the reasons for distorting the truth go much deeper than others.

Philosophical limitations:

Some people base their reason for distorting the truth on personal experiences, other reasons may be less conscious. Personality types can also have an effect on responses given in an interview (http://www.stetson.edu/~bboozer/Survivor/day27.html).

While the research method was chosen because it offers an efficient and accessible way to gain insight into the transitioner's perception of his transition, through the benefit of

hindsight, the researcher feels that they would adopt some slight changes for possible future research.

The absence of in-depth qualitative responses to the open question made it more difficult to gather a generalised view of how the respondent commented on his transition process. For future research the researcher would consider using a greater number of respondents to generate evidence, and a mix of both quantative and in particular more qualitative data, which is "concerned with meanings and the way people understand things" (Denscombe, 2005, p. 267). Resource and issues of economy meant that this was not possible on this occasion.

Issues remaining

The main issues facing services who work with people during the transition phase include the following: -

Funding

Marketing

Resourcing

Recommendations for future research

The subject of this research could cover the topic of a PhD thesis and probably should. This study has helped to stimulate the researcher's interest further into the whole idea of transition. Since starting this study, the researcher has began to think more about other areas of possible research, such as how much do other practitioners working with transitioners i.e. youth workers, teachers and counsellor's truly understand about the role and value of transition? and what impact would this have? Moreover, if professions working with people did manage to increase their understanding as to what factors affect transitions, then how would this help services to foster a greater number of successful transitions.

Points for further development

Advice and guidance on the nature and importance of transition.

Enhanced promotion.

The list of issues given here is not exhaustive, but covers some of the main areas to be tackled by colleges which are committed to the transition process.

Further thoughts

It is apparent to me that the transitioner did feel supported during their transition and therefore did feel ready to make his transition to the next phase. There seems to be various reasons for this. Firstly, the college and all other partner agencies working with the transitioner adopted a person centred approach to the transition: placing great significance on effective communication and a commitment to the well-being/needs of the transitioner throughout. The Youth Matters: (YM) Green Paper (2005) argues for partnership working between local authorities, children's organisations, parents and the young people themselves to best. Through implementing a shared vision of transition, the YM (2005) agenda seeks to promote autonomy, decision making and ultimately "a smooth transition into mainstream adult services" (p. 3).

Secondly, any successful service depends upon effective communication between the service provider and the service user (Valuing People, White Paper (2001), therefore the positive "characteristics … (and commitment)… of the … (transitioner)… "(Fabian, p. 23) helped to ensure a successful transition.

One can see therefore, that effective communication between all involved was of central importance to the outcomes of the transition (Fabian, 2007). Effective communication is even more vital for people with learning difficulties/disabilities (Valuing People, White Paper, 2001).

Recommendations for future practice

Despite the above examples of good practice and partnership working, there are two aspects which could be developed. Firstly, acknowledgement that the outcomes of the transition are the responsibility of all people involved in the transition. This includes policy makers, the organisations, the parents and the transitioner.

Secondly, the promotion of transition is not fully marketed to the extent that it could be. Greater attention should be paid to the promotion of transition; whereas policy makers and service providers need to ensure that the transitioner is at the heart of the transition planning from the beginning and throughout the entire transition process.

Thirdly, "planning groups made up of different organisations need to look at what happens to young people after transition" (Growing up matters, 2007, p. 9). As identified in this paper, transitioners may find it difficult to identify what specific factors are important to them during the transition process, yet often find it easier to discuss retrospectively. Collating feedback from transitioners post-transition will enable service providers to build on existing practice and identify possible areas for improvement.

These recommendations are intended to enhance future practice and aims to ensure that service providers continually strive to promote the best levels of service for its users, through a person centred approach to transitions.

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

Finally, I have learned much through this exercise. I have learnt that research is a very hard slog and doesn't always turn out the way in which you expect it. As a result, the researcher has become even further intrigued to explore how much people know about transitions and how can this level of understanding be measured, baring in mind all human beings have their own way of viewing the world and the things around them. Regardless of this enhanced curiosity, the researcher has identified areas of professional development and will aim to use the findings to enhance future practice as a teacher, youth worker and counsellor. For example; the researcher is even more determined now to promote the benefits of transitions and feels that organisations who work with people during the transition phase should continually strive to enable transitioners to make informed decisions for themselves (based on empathic understanding) and keep transitioners at the heart of the process throughout.

In conclusion, transition can be a challenging process, engendering new experiences and times of uncertainty, where policy makers and organisations alike still have a long hill to climb to ensure successful transitions for all.

REFERENCES

1. Bruner, J. (1996), The Culture of Education. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

2. Bloom, B, S. (1956), Taxonomy of educational objectives, Handbook 1, Cognitive domain, David McKay, London.

3. Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979), The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

4. Cambridge, P. and Carnaby, S. (2005), Person Centred Planning and Care Management with People with Learning Disabilities. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

5. Curzon, L.B. (1997), Teaching in Further Education. 5th Ed. Continuum Education, London

6. DeFur, S.H. (1999). Transition, special education, and school-based services: Are they meant for each other. In S. DeFur & J. Patton, (Ed). Transition and School-Based Service: Perspectives for Enhancing the Transition Process, (pp. 15-50). Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

7. Denscombe, M. (2005), The Good Research (2ed), Open University Press

8. Department for Education and Employment, (2000), The Revised code (SEN code of Practice). Special Children, September 2000.

9. Department of Health. (2001), Valuing People, a new strategy for learning disability in the 21St century.

10. College. (2006-2008): Intranet Information on Student. [Accessed 5th October 2008, 9.24 a.m]

11. Fabian, H. (2002), Children Starting School: A Guide to Successful Transitions and Transfers for Teachers and Assistants, London: David Fulton Publishers

12. Fabian, H. & Dunlop, A, W. (2007), Informing Transitions in the Early Years: Research Policy and Practice. New York, Open University Press, McGraw Hill

13. Gardener, H. (2001), Frames of Mind: Theory of Multiple Intelligence, Basic Books, New York

14. Growing Up Matters, (2007), Better transition planning for young people with complex needs. Available: http://www.csci.org.uk/PDF/growing_up_matters.pdf. Accessed 24th November 2008, 2.54 p.m]

15. Kennedy, C. (1993), Guide to the Management Gurus, Business Books, London

16. Maslow, A, (1954), Motivation and Personality, Harper and Row, cited in Cole, C. (2001), Management Theory and Practice (6ed), Thompson learning.

17. Maykut, P. & Morehouse, R. (1994), Beginning Qualitative Research, A Philosophic and Practical Guide (1ed), London: RutledgeFalmer.

18. Prime Minister's Strategy Unit. (2005), Improving the life chances of disabled people, A joint report with: Department for Work and Pensions, Department of Health, Department for Education and Skills, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister,Available: http://www.housingoptions.org.uk/gi_documents/resources_docs/Life_Chan ces.pdf. [Accessed 14th October 2008, 19.41 p.m]

19. Rogers, R, C. (1967), On Becoming A Person, A therapist's view of psychotherapy, New York: Constable

20. Tomlinson (1996), A Summary of the findings of the Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities Committee.

21. Transition Planning for Youths with Special Needs: A Community Support Guide, (2006). Available: http:/www.gov.bc.ca/mcf: [Accessed 12th November 2008, 9.24 a.m]

22. http:/www.stetson.edu/~bboozer/Survivor/day27.html). [Electronically accessed 8th December 2008, 11.24 a.m]