

Section 1

Planning

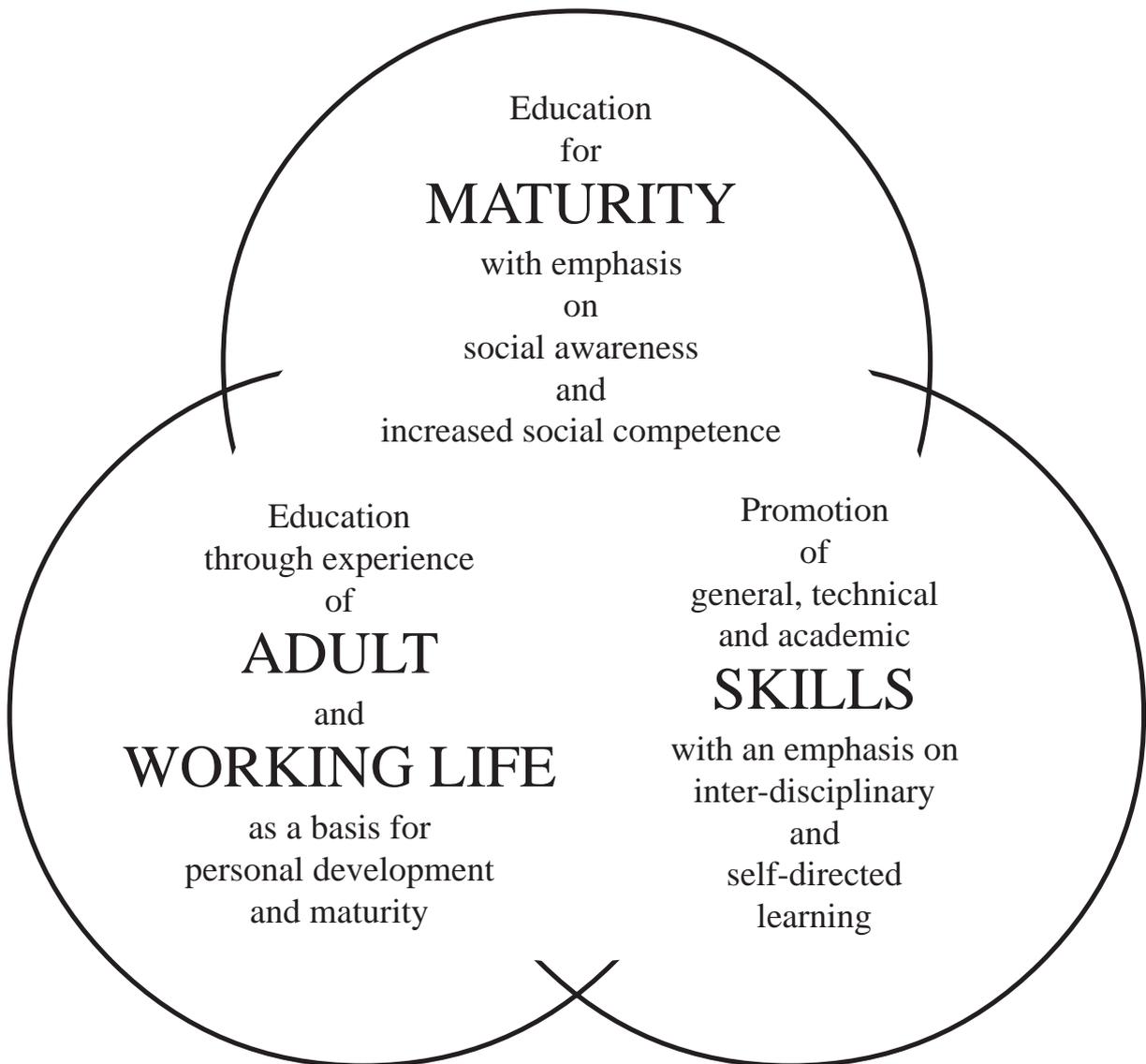
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Transition Year

The Mission

To promote the personal, social, educational and vocational development of the students, and to prepare them for their role as autonomous, participative and responsible members of society.

Overall aims



Change and Curriculum

Curriculum is a selection from culture. If the culture changes, can the curriculum - or should the curriculum - stay static?

During certain periods of history change is more rapid and pronounced than at other periods. Indeed constant change is a core characteristic of contemporary society. Many social commentators believe that Irish Society is currently in a state of profound transition between older and newer social moulds and value systems.

As teachers, are we satisfied that the cultural content and learning processes of the curriculum are the most appropriate for the development and preparation of our young people for life in the 21st century?

Transition Year can provide a framework of sufficient flexibility and sensitivity to respond to contemporary culture and to the changing social content in the six following areas:

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 Demographic factors | 4 International Perspectives |
| 2 New Technology | 5 Social Problems |
| 3 Mass Media | 6 Value Systems |

There are many forms of curriculum such as the liberal classical curriculum, which is the subject-dominated curriculum in post-primary education, the progressive curriculum sometimes referred to as child centred and associated with primary school, and the technocratic curriculum favoured by those who believe that education should be essentially vocational training. A so-called national curriculum tries to mould the good citizen.

The form of Transition Year as proposed in the *Guidelines* fits in most easily with the cultural analysis curriculum, which holds that the curriculum must relate to the contemporary world outside school and allow for democratic selection and negotiated learning.

The basic rationale for Transition Year can be outlined under ten headings:

- 1 To provide a learning structure which promotes maturation
- 2 To develop a wide range of cognitive and emotional processes
- 3 To be learning-led rather than exam-led
- 4 To provide breadth and balance in the curriculum
- 5 To provide experiential learning
- 6 To learn through networking with other schools and social agencies
- 7 To encourage variety in teaching and learning styles
- 8 To develop life skills
- 9 To encourage a more professional use of assessment
- 10 To lead the student to the point where self-regulated learning takes place

Learning

from

Experience

In December 1993 sixty-three teachers with experience of Transition Year began a six-day training course at the Teachers' Centre, Drumcondra. This training was to facilitate their working with full teaching staffs in schools which would offer a Transition Year Programme in 1994-95.

A questionnaire was distributed on the first day of the course and the responses to it informed the planning of the subsequent training days and some of the input to schools between January and March 1994.

The teachers were asked three questions, and a selection of their responses appears on the following pages.

Question One

What are the main strengths of Transition Year in your school?

The rich variety of responses indicates how positively many of the participants view Transition Year. At a glance, the selection listed below, drawn from these responses, quickly draws attention to many features which a school needs to attend to in order to ensure a Transition Year Programme of high quality.

Well-accepted by parents, students and staff
Positive attitude of staff and management
Goodwill and co-operation of the Principal and staff
Community support and involvement
Part-time parental involvement
Parental support
Management support for visitors, outings etc
General maturation of students
Personal and social development of students
Personal development of students and staff
Carefully planned through action research with Marino Institute
Facilities and time for the co-ordinator
Well suited to students' needs
Student based (biased!)
Student centred curriculum resulting in maturation and self-confidence
Freedom to take subjects not included in JC
No exams
Balance between academic and non-academic subjects
Provides creative experiences for students to learn in an unpressurised environment
Enthusiasm of the co-ordinator
Broad based curriculum
Variety of learning experiences
Self-directed learning
Non-directive teaching approach
Willingness to try new things
The opportunity for staff to use a variety of teaching styles and methods
A more adult relationship with students at an earlier age
Student-teacher relationship greatly improved

Students grow in self-confidence and self-awareness
The broad exposure to opportunities to develop social competencies
Work experience
Tourism Awareness Programme
Flat-living - well prepared, monitored and evaluated
European Studies
Minicompany
Media Studies
Special activities week
Musical
Social education
Non-school based modules
Social Action
Community Service
Career orientation
Cohesive core group
Trips and outings
Students' involvement in various enterprises
Students opt in, therefore they are motivated
Social skills acquired by the students
Teamwork among students
Inter-disciplinary aspects
Improves students' abilities to deal with LC - maturity, study skills, motivation, subject choice
It gives the senior cycle flexibility
Constant re-statement of aims for students
Giving of free time by some of staff - weekends, nights etc
Self-esteem of weaker students improves
Confidence building
Re-tailored each year to meet students' needs

Question Two

What aspects of Transition Year in your school would you like to see improve?

This selection of responses can provide schools with an important checklist of possible pitfalls.

More whole staff participation and co-operation	More support for the student who has achieved poorly in JC
Inter-disciplinary approach	Initially we planned a highly academic TYP: the academic content needs reduction.
More variety in modules	More evaluation
Community links	Better parental awareness
Teacher training in methodologies	Introduce life skills
To change much more to student-centred learning	Personal development/life skills - often given to 'weak' teachers or teachers with too narrow a vision (boring!)
More group work in classes	Social and personal development
Timetabling flexibility to provide modules not available on staff - art, leisure, music	More emphasis on out-of-school learning
Less of an 'ad hoc' approach to courses	Maybe we should be less selective about students
More time for co-ordinating	More pastoral care
Reduction of hours for the co-ordinator so as to have more time with group	More emphasis on oral skills
More time for TYP staff to plan, monitor and evaluate the programme	More whole staff support - tend to be negative at times
Assessment	Teacher motivation
More interest, advice and help from non-TYP staff	Academic content of core subjects
Funds	More in-service in academic areas, evaluation and assessment
Maths	More emphasis on research and self-directed learning by students
Improve image - so that TYP is not seen as something for weaker students	Review of courses which have gone 'stale'
Improve image with students, parents and some staff	

Question Three

What one single piece of advice about TYP would you wish to pass on to a school planning its first programme?

The responses to this question reinforce and underline many of the points which arose from the previous two questions. The need for adequate preparation comes across very strongly. Below is a selection of the responses.

Prepare well: don't be over ambitious; admit mistakes and rectify them.

You must believe in the philosophy of TYP and the education of the whole person. You must be willing to accept change in your school.

Don't be afraid: run with the risks. Plan, plan, plan; draw on the collective wisdom of the whole school and community.

Keep it simple with clear aims and objectives that can be easily evaluated and assessed.

Don't give up - it takes a few years to get it right.

Devise programmes suited to individual needs and circumstances.

TYP can work: the enthusiasm of teachers can transfer to students and parents.

Plan carefully - set realistic goals - have flexible timetabling - have enthusiastic co-ordinator.

Research first, plan with flexibility, adopt an inter-disciplinary approach and student-centred methodologies.

Provide time for planning and co-ordinating - e.g. a weekly meeting of core teachers.

Work with a small team of 4/5 which meets regularly.

Develop a curriculum to achieve TYP aims.

Have a structured programme with plenty of variety: no free classes so that it won't be called a 'doss' year, and have an energetic team co-ordinating TYP.

Have it well planned, well structured: write down plans, outings etc and adhere to these. Avoid slotting in activities at a moment's notice.

It has to have experienced, competent, child-centred teachers to start it and give it status.

Ensure the whole-school approach is adopted: be patient, teachers are not revolutionary!

Festina lente!

Gather an energetic and imaginative co-ordinator and team and have a supportive Principal.

Punctuate the year plan with special events.

Every subject department should have responsibility - even if it is not every teacher within every Department.

Give a lot of time to preparation and planning - the first year will determine to a large extent the success or otherwise of TYP.

A very worthwhile programme but the whole school must own it from the outset.

Ignore the cynics!

Key Decisions

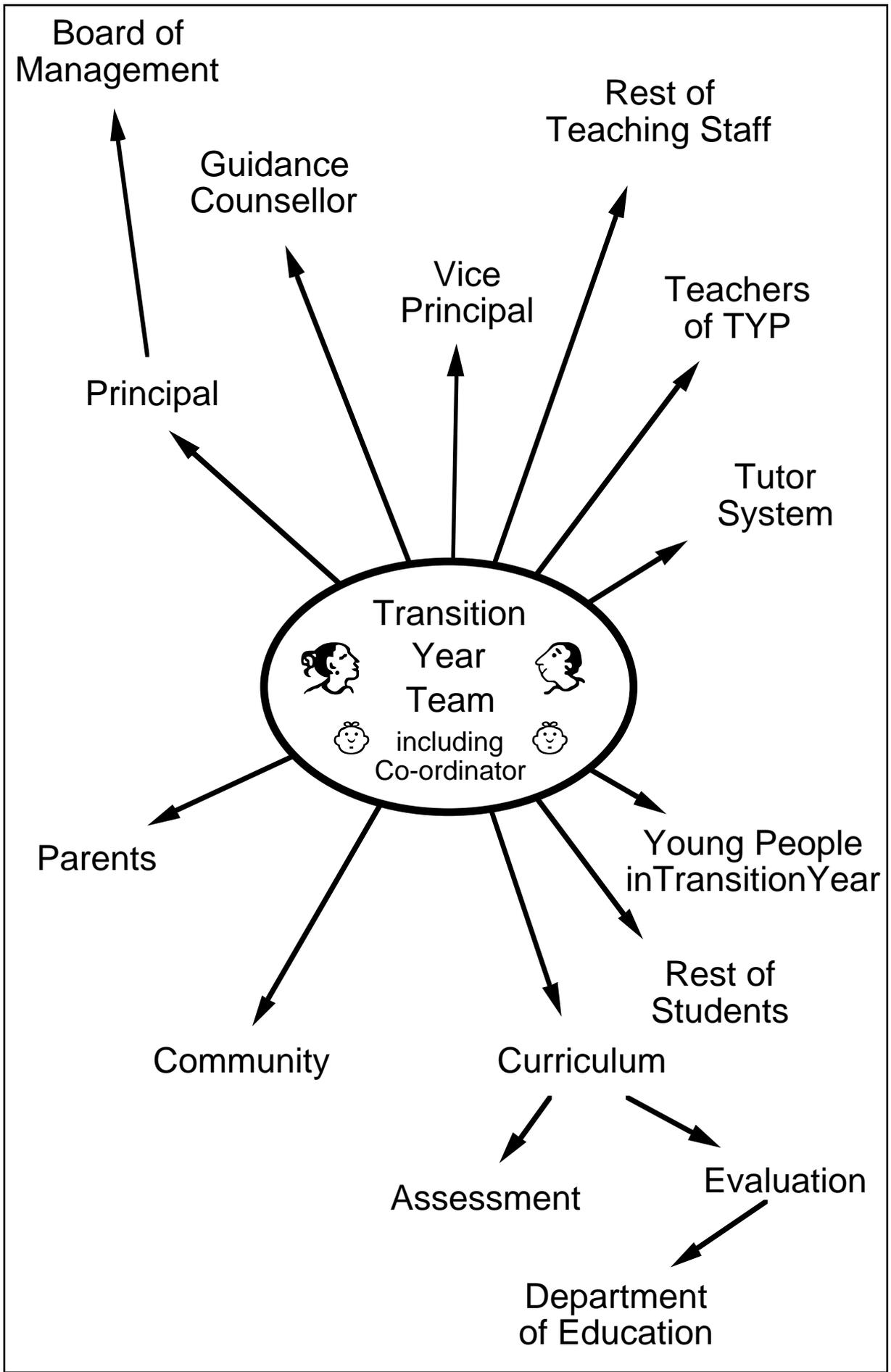
to be taken

- 1 Select co-ordinator and team.
- 2 Decide on target group.
- 3 Articulate a statement of vision and aims.
- 4 Clarify how each subject contributes to the aims.
- 5 Ensure curriculum coherence and balance.
- 6 Allocate adequate time for each element of the programme.
- 7 Develop individual subject input to programme.
- 8 Specify arrangements for each subject area.
- 9 Identify resource/training requirements.
- 10 Complete the programme document.
- 11 Consult parents and students.
- 12 Agree a system of assessment and certification.
- 13 Plan for evaluation/review/revision.
- 14 Clarify implications for 5th and 6th years.

Team Work

Putting **A TYP Calendar** together

What?	When?	Who?
Pre-Planning+Information		
For TYP Team		
For TPY Teachers		
For Students		
For Parents		
Documentation		
Selecting students		
Regular Planning Meetings		
Assessments		
Induction day		
In-Career Development		
Outdoor Pursuits		
Other Trips		
Work Experience		
Displays and Exhibitions		
Special Events		
Finance		
Student Attendance		
Visiting Speakers		
Monitoring and Evaluation		
Certification		
Graduation		



A Checklist for Co-ordination

COMMUNICATION

- Meet Principal to arrange year's meetings.
- Facilitate meetings.
- Notice on staff bulletin board
- Decide which TYP team member will deal with
 - outside events
 - speakers
 - internal activities
 - school trips
- Work experience
 - ensuring jobs are secured
 - Visits or phone call to workplace
 - Evaluating the experience
- Co-ordinate contact with parents
 - formal meetings
 - phone queries
 - casual visits
 - on-going 'education' of parents re TYP concept

STUDENTS

- Interview prospective students.
- Devise and implement a policy for
 - Discipline
 - Attendance
 - Punctuality
 - Compliance with work deadlines.
 - Motivation of students.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

- Collect ideas from staff on what could, or should, be on TYP curriculum.
- Decide with staff on content of curriculum.
- Identify one person from each faculty to co-ordinate the faculty on a yearly basis.
- Facilitate TYP curriculum development
 - Beware of staleness and comfortable rut.
- Facilitate TYP staff development.
 - Watch out for indications of staff needs for methodology training.
 - Look for in-school expertise.
 - Look to neighbouring schools for help.
 - If necessary, bring in outside experts.

ASSESSMENT

- Avoid overloading staff: stagger assignments.
- Assignments must be user-friendly: keep it simple!
- Decide with staff
 - the *form* of assessment.
 - *when* it should take place.
 - *how* it should be done.
 - *which areas* should be assessed.
- Pilot a system for one term and evaluate.

FINANCE

- Cost of
 - Office services
 - Materials
 - Field trips
 - Exchanges etc

FACILITIES

- Use of telephone
- Office, with desk, filing cabinet
- Office facilities
 - eg photocopying
- TYP Notice-board

PARTING MESSAGES

- Student-centred learning
- Planning, planning, planning, planning
 - and more planning
- On-going motivation
 - staff and students
- Resources, human and material
- Evaluation
- TYP is not easy *but* it's well worth while.
- Whole-school approach
- Be open to change *but* hasten slowly.
- Need for staff development
- The Trojan horse!

A Co-ordinator's Year

March to June (Preceding Year)

- Selection criteria, if places are limited
- Parents' information night
- Facilitation of TYP Teachers
 - Meeting: curriculum content
- Investigation of probable student subject/module choice
- Timetabling arrangements
- Draft outline of TYP calendar
- Staff development needs
- Written information to parents
 - e.g. book list
- Timetabling arrangements for TYP planning team meetings

September

- Planned TYP teachers' meeting
 - Timetabling - finance for year
 - Facilities - phone / fax / photocopy
- Year plan to Principal, staff, parents, students
- Communication: clarify methods with
 - Principal and vice-Principal
 - whole staff - parents - students
- Information to parents
 - Year plan - book list
 - Discipline procedures
 - Standard of behaviour on trips
- Student interviews, Contract of Learning
- Grouping of students for work on modules
- Highlights for first term

October to December

- Plan highlight
- End-of-term assessment
 - Timetabling - Deadlines - Recording
- End-of-year reports
- Attendance / Punctuality
- Musical production
 - Timetabling - Co-ordination
- Display of student work

January to April

- Review progress
- Additions / Alterations to calendar
- Plan highlight
- Display of student work
- Work experience
 - Placements - Insurance
 - Monitoring - Evaluation
- End-of-term assessment
- Report for Parent/Teacher meeting

April to June

- Facilitate evaluation of programme by
 - TY planning team - TY teachers
 - staff - students
- Presentation night
 - students and parents
- Certification
- End-of-year report

TYP Projects

While devising a specific TYP timetable, schools should also plan a TYP calendar. This focus on a calendar draws attention to the numerous possibilities offered by TYP to engage in projects which last a few hours, a day, a few days or a week but which need not run throughout the year. Many schools find that such activities significantly enrich the students' learning experiences. Adjusting timetables can cause some initial disruption, but once clearly explained to all concerned, usually results in student, parent, and teacher acceptance of the value of specific 'once-off' projects within the TYP.

When planning the programme, it can be very constructive to invite each subject/module to contribute at least ONE special event to the programme. As well as giving the subject/module a different profile among TYP students, the special activity can also become the focus of work for the class.

Another idea can be to offer each subject/module the possibility of a SIGNIFICANT LEARNING DAY. Here the subject/module is offered the opportunity of using the external learning environment in a meaningful way for a full day. Study trips to places such as art galleries, theatres, laboratories, work-places, the sea, etc., exhibitions, museums, concerts, other schools and so on, often become memorable highlights of a TYP, especially when students are prepared in advance and the experience is built on in subsequent classes.

Careers Exhibition
Concern Fast
Concert
Debates
Dramatic productions
Exhibitions of student work
Fund-raising activities
Hiking trips
Kellogs PE projects
International Women's Day
Magazine production
Mini-Company
Musicals
Music recitals
Open days
Orchestra visits
Outdoor pursuits
Parents evenings
Photographic exhibitions
Poetry readings
Public speaking events
School shop
Table quizzes
Visiting drama groups
Visiting speakers
Visit to workplaces
Visits to places of worship
Walks
Work Experience
World Human Rights Day

Significant Learning Days

A useful way of utilising the environment outside the school is to develop a calendar interspersed with Significant Learning Days. Basically this involves going to subject/module teachers and saying: If you had your Transition Year students for a full school day, what significant learning experiences could take place?

When teachers recover from an initial shock or point out that every day should be a significant learning day, they quickly follow by suggesting exciting possibilities: a field trip, a workshop with a theatre group, a day of international cuisine, a trip to a gallery; excursions to laboratories, building sites, engineering works, computer centres, mosques, cinemas, archaeological sites, the stock exchange etc; visits by poets, musicians, writers, composers - a long list can be drawn up with every subject area making contributions.

By indicating to each subject/module area at the planning stage that significant learning days will be included in the TYP calendar, great variety can be included in the pro-

gramme. Many of these days become focal points for teachers, students and their parents and can be among the externally high profile features of a TYP programme. Such planning also challenges each subject/module to be imaginative, selecting the most appropriate activity for their significant learning day which will support and complement classroom teaching and learning.

Organisationally, there has to be whole staff agreement that on such days those who normally teach Transition Year classes will cover the classes for their colleagues who are working all day with the Transition Year students. The success of this arrangement can also depend very much on those 'going away' teachers ensuring that appropriate work is left for their 'normal' classes.

If there is an even spread of significant learning days throughout the year, then all TYP teachers avail of the opportunities and recognise that the learning experiences for the students are worth the disruption to the 'normal' timetable.

Some Possibilities

History

Following class preparation and accompanied by worksheets, students visit local museum.

Following tour, visit site of historic battle.

Conclude with street interviews with older citizens about their memories of a specific historic event (The Emergency, Suez, Cuban Missile Crisis, the introduction of television, Northern Ireland prior to 1968 etc).

Social and Political Studies

Visit to Leinster House, the Four Courts, a street survey (prepared questionnaire) and 'social orienteering' which involve calling to various public offices etc seeking specified information.

Biology

Visit to Botanic (or other) Gardens with worksheets. Trip to coastal location or Zoo in the afternoon.

French

Visit to Alliance Francaise followed by trip to the National Gallery to examine the work of French painters. Return to school to prepare and eat a French meal. All proceedings conducted in French.

Gaeilge

A table quiz followed by a short drama performed by a visiting group. Traditional music performed live followed by a Ceili .

Checklist for

INFORMING PARENTS

about the Transition Year Programme

The process of giving formal, systematic information about TYP should usually start in the first term of 3rd year.

- Rationale for TYP
- This school's TYP programme in outline
- Differences between TYP and Junior Cycle
- Differences between TYP and Leaving Certificate programmes
- Choices open to students in this school
- Work Experience
- Outings and other uses of the external learning environment
- Insurance
- Assess resources (including human) for TYP within this school.
- Likely charges to be incurred by families during TYP
- Homework, assignments, projects etc
- "It's not a doss year!"
- Role of parents in giving support and encouragement to TYP students
- Concrete examples of ways in which parents can assist in making TYP in this school successful
- Emphasis on TYP as a learning opportunity



What about the **TYP brochure**, and/or video '**The Right Track**' and/or **open day** and/or an **information night**?



What is to be said at the **Parent-Teacher meeting** for 3rd year students?

Checklist for INDUCTION SESSIONS

with TYP students at start of Programme

- ✓ Overall aims of TYP
- ✓ Differences between TYP and the Junior Cycle
- ✓ Differences between TYP and the Leaving Certificate programmes
- ✓ Outline of component parts of the programme and the rationale for each part.
- ✓ Focus on personal and social development
- ✓ Work experiences as a learning experience
- ✓ Differences between work experience and part-time employment
- ✓ Insurance as it applies to TYP
- ✓ The external learning environment
- ✓ Homework, projects and assignments
- ✓ TYP calendar with major and minor events and deadlines
- ✓ Modes and techniques of assessment in TYP
- ✓ Emphasis on TYP as individual opportunity for personal learning
- ✓ Contract of Learning
- ✓ Attendance during TYP
- ✓ Reminder of behaviour expected from TYP students
- ✓ Certification



Ensure that parents are informed fully about what students are being told about their teachers' expectations from TYP.

The Individual Teacher

and Transition Year

The TYP Guidelines state that the overall mission of Transition Year is to promote the personal, social, educational and vocational development of the students and to prepare them for their role as autonomous, participative and responsible members of society.

For this mission to be implemented successfully, real demands will be made on teachers. The Guidelines, however, offer an enriched vision of the role of the professional teacher. Transition Year, viewed positively, can be both a challenge and an opportunity for each teacher. An effective TYP, implemented well, can not only contribute significantly to young people's learning but can also promote teacher development and lead to greater job satisfaction.

In particular, the Transition Year Programme

- * challenges teachers to further develop their own expertise especially in the areas of curriculum design, delivery and assessment.
- * invites teachers to be active, creative and flexible in their involvement with curriculum design.
- * encourages teachers to implement a variety of teaching styles and methods (e.g. negotiated learning, project work, group discussion etc.).
- * allows teachers to devise programmes suited to the specific learning needs and styles of their own students.
- * gives teachers opportunities to extend the learning environment beyond the classroom and to develop non-school-based learning situations.
- * can have a spill-over effect into Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes.
- * promotes the idea of teamwork and gives teachers practical opportunities to work closely with colleagues.
- * prompts teachers to apply forms of assessment other than terminal examinations.
- * encourages teachers to explore and present material in original and stimulating ways.
- * allows teachers to respond to students' personal and social needs beyond the confines of exam-focused syllabi.
- * encourages teachers to explore with their colleagues the links between subjects so as to present students with a more unified perspective.
- * challenges whole staffs to evaluate actively and regularly how well the TYP is meeting students' needs.
- * allows some teachers to relate directly with people in places of employment other than school, in the wider community, thus forging closer links between school and community.

Sixteen Points for Parents

In September 1994 the number of schools offering a Transition Year Programme will jump from the present 159 to almost 600. More than 20,000 fifteen and sixteen year olds will be 'in Transition' during the next school year. Transition Year, sandwiched between the compulsory schooling of the Junior Certificate Course and the optional two-year Leaving Certificate, provides space for personal growth while at the same time building a solid base for the Leaving Certificate. This brief guide for parents highlights some of the key ideas associated with Transition Year.

1 Transition Year is focused on promoting maturity. It recognises that 15-16 year olds are at a crucial stage on the pathway from childhood dependence towards adult independence. A Transition Year Programme (TYP) allows young people to become more aware of themselves and of the world around them. Decision-making can be more informed and ambitions more focused.

2 The emphasis is on developing skills rather than on simply remembering facts. Such skills - academic, technical and general - stand to people for life. Skills in maths, languages and study are especially relevant for a Leaving Certificate programme.

3 Young people can gain realistic insights into adult and working life. A 'work experience' placement of a week or two, where employers co-operate with schools in allowing students to sample a workplace environment at first hand, has been a major milestone on many young people's path to maturity.

4 Students can develop more independent study habits. The emphasis is on on-going assessment rather than on a terminal exam. Project work, for example, where a student has to plan and execute a piece of work over a number of days or weeks, can promote self-regulated learning. Rather than have students lose any study habits, TYP can lay a solid base for learning in a more adult, responsible way.

5 The year lays a solid foundation for a Leaving Certificate programme. At the end of a TYP these young people can be better equipped, better motivated and more clearly focused than their counterparts who did not have the benefit of the year. This foundation can also be a solid base for a more mature and consistent approach to third-level studies after the Leaving Certificate.

- 6 Transition Year is not dominated by an exam at the end of the course. Therefore, there is space and opportunity for each school to concentrate on aspects of learning which don't always feature on either the Junior or Leaving Certificate courses. Qualities which might not otherwise flourish are often developed. Individuality is respected and fostered.
- 7 TYP offers young people a broader variety of topics and subjects. For example, some schools currently include outdoor pursuits, health education, media studies, computer studies, tourism awareness, as well as specialised language, scientific and aesthetic modules.
- 8 TYP gets students and teachers out of the classroom, into other learning environments. Trips to galleries, workplaces, museums, theatres and other stimulating locations feature in many programmes. Some schools also offer opportunities for foreign travel, though many schools are careful not to add unnecessary additional costs when offering a TYP.
- 9 Transition Year places a heavy emphasis on learning from experience. This recognition of the validity of young people's own lived experience means that they are continually challenged to make sense of their own experiences. Studying aspects of popular culture such as fashion, advertising, popular music, cinema, etc. can increase the motivation for learning and add to the growth of self-esteem.
- 10 Students who have missed out on parts of the Junior Certificate course can use Transition Year to catch up or fill in gaps in their learning before starting a Leaving Certificate programme. This can be especially relevant in maths and languages.
- 11 Young people can learn the skills of dealing with people in practical ways. There can be a lot of contact with adults outside the school. Oral communication skills, so relevant to all aspects of living and working, are highlighted. Many teachers identify the growth of young people's confidence and self-esteem through Transition Year Programmes as the key benefit of the year.
- 12 Attention to careers, third-level courses, the realities of employment and unemployment are central concerns in Transition Year. Work experience or work simulation or work shadowing features on every programme. By the end of a Transition Year programme young people have often changed their career hopes and plans quite radically from the ones they had twelve months earlier.
- 13 Students can follow and develop special interests. These might be sporting, leisure, academic or social interests. The flexibility offered by Transition Year means it can be an ideal opportunity for teenagers to respond to challenges such as Gaisce (The President's Award Scheme) and the Young Scientist of the Year competition.

14 Transition Year links schools more directly with their immediate communities. Students can become involved in activities such as voluntary work, community service or local surveys. The community resources of individual parents and other people are also being imaginatively integrated into many TY programmes.

15 Each school is free to design its programme to meet the needs of its own students. This promotes enterprise and professional development among teachers. That spirit of enterprise can be passed on to the young people in very practical ways. A mini-company, where TYP students actually set up their own business enterprise, is just one example of an imaginative innovation which many teachers find successful.

16 Transition Year can encourage more mature relationships between parents and their children. Many parents remark that they have been changed through their sons' or daughters' experiences of a TY programme. At the end of a day's work experience or a particularly stimulating field trip, parents are often the ones best positioned to listen. Frequently, the biggest lessons learned by the young person are about himself or herself. Again, with project work or other learning strategies used in TYP, parents can feel more centrally involved in the growing-up and learning process. Thus, Transition Year also provides special opportunities for parents!

Transition Year - Key Points

- Maturity
- Directed to adult and working life
- Solid foundation for Leaving Certificate
- Outside the classroom
- "Catch-up" chances
- Builds confidence and self-esteem
- Career focus
- Skills development
- Study skills
- Personality development
- Variety
- Experience is valued
- Special interest
- Community links
- Promotes enterprise
- Parental involvement

Issues

of Co-ordination and Implementation

(Some of these scenarios were used as part of the training programmes for TYP in Feb-Mar 1994)

A teacher speaks:

“I was never a fan of Transition Year. I tried to put some of the new ideas into practice, but they didn’t work. There were no books. So I’m now using the Leaving Certificate book, doing real course work. I’m happy and the students are happy.”

The Group should discuss this situation and then clarify:

- 1 Who are the appropriate people to respond to this situation?
- 2 What actions might be appropriate?

One of the Transition Year core group speaks:

“Transition Year got off to a good start. That was in September. Now that it is mid-November I’ve noticed that in all four classes there is a big increase in absenteeism. Some of it is only for parts of a day and often it seems there are notes from parents excusing the students.”

The Group should discuss this situation and then clarify:

- 1 Who are the appropriate people to respond to this situation?
- 2 What actions might be appropriate?

Following the recent parent-teacher meeting, the TYP Co-ordinator says:

“A lot of parents didn’t appear too happy with the shape of Transition Year. Some were comparing us to the school up the road which seems to have students going on trips here, there and everywhere every other day. Others moan about homework and keep calling it a ‘doss’ year. Someone else wanted to know why we haven’t more student exchanges with Europe and then there were complaints about the cost”.

The Group should discuss this situation and then clarify:

- 1 Who are the appropriate people to respond to this situation?
- 2 What actions might be appropriate?

A teacher speaks:

“I think that Transition Year is an excellent innovation. But, in my opinion, Transition Year has too many disruptions. Every day there seems to be a bus outside the door to take the students away. Then there are debates, visits of orchestras, field trips, visiting speakers, work experience; all very well but too disruptive to my teaching. It’s all stop-start stuff and they’re learning very little. We’ll have to cut out the disruptions.”

The Group should discuss this situation and then clarify:

1. Who are the appropriate people to respond to this situation?
2. What actions might be appropriate?

A member of the Transition Year core group speaks:

“When we planned Transition Year everyone agreed on the importance of various forms of assessment. It was to be on-going, with entries made by teachers into the students’ records at three times during the year. Projects, portfolios, tapes, assignments, orals, rating scales even measurement of personal development were all meant to happen. It’s now mid-February, mid-term break, and I see no evidence of any assessment being done.”

The Group should discuss this situation and then clarify:

- 1 Who are the appropriate people to respond to this situation?
- 2 What actions might be appropriate?

The Co-ordinator speaks:

“Overall I think that the Guidance Counsellor makes a good contribution by organising work experience placements. But look at this. There is a student’s report from a placement, very negative: it looks as if they were really unprepared for him, gave him very little direction. He says that he spent lots of the time doing nothing, bored. And look at the employer’s report, which is just fulsome praise: ‘diligent’, ‘enthusiastic’, ‘pleasant’, ‘co-operative’, ‘shows initiative’, all scored highly. Which do I believe?”

The Group should discuss this situation and then clarify:

- 1 Who are the appropriate people to respond to this situation?
- 2 What actions might be appropriate?

A teacher speaks at a staff meeting:

“Transition Year has made my job much harder. The students are forever telling me that they were doing this exciting work in Ms So-and-So’s class or getting a great buzz doing these modules, Mini-companies and so on. But Transition Year has to be more than frills. I want them to learn Irish. They say it’s so dull, they’re ‘turned off’. And I thought that this core group was meant to be a support to all teachers of Transition Year. They’re having this planning meeting and that planning meeting but what help am I getting?”

The Group should discuss this situation and then clarify:

- 1 Who are the appropriate people to respond to this situation?
- 2 What actions might be appropriate?

Getting it Right from the Start

Twenty-one suggestions for making the Programme effective

- Plan well in advance.
- Write down everything that is planned.
- Draw on the experience and expertise of the whole staff.
- Set realistic goals.
- Make sure what is planned can be implemented.
- Develop a whole-school approach.
- Allow time for planning.
- Be patient.
- Ensure that interdisciplinary work is taking place.
- Encourage teachers to network with each other.
- Keep a written record of all aspects of the programme.
- Plan for 'highlights' during the year.
- Consult students for their suggestions.
- Ask parents for their opinions about what TYP should do.
- Always check that students needs are being met.
- Make sure a variety of teaching and learning methodologies are being used.
- Vary the modes and techniques of assessment.
- Continually evaluate the programme.
- Network with other schools.
- When a problem emerges, identify it accurately and address it.
- Work towards TYP becoming a natural part of the whole school programme.

Twenty Red Lights

- * **Don't** confuse making a timetable with adequate planning.
- * **Don't** confine your curriculum to traditional subjects.
- * **Don't** ease up on relevant homework assignments.
- * **Don't** keep parents in the dark about TYP.
- * **Don't** overload the co-ordinator.
- * **Don't** isolate the core team.
- * **Don't** take for granted employers who facilitate work experience.
- * **Don't** ask students to do projects without first ensuring that they know what is expected of them.
- * **Don't** allow TYP to become associated with 'free classes'.
- * **Don't** forget to vary teaching and learning methodologies.
- * **Don't** isolate individual subjects.
- * **Don't** allow terminal assessment to dominate or distort the TYP.
- * **Don't** underestimate the expertise and potential support of teaching colleagues.
- * **Don't** neglect consistent monitoring of TYP.
- * **Don't** let student conservatism kill teacher initiative and innovation.
- * **Don't** confuse lack of resources with lack of imagination.
- * **Don't** arrive later for TYP classes than for any others.
- * **Don't** be afraid to admit mistakes and to take corrective action.
- * **Don't** attempt the impossible.
- * **Don't** see things negatively!