

# **Moving Schools: Using Forum Technology to enable a Peer-Mentored Element of a Transition Programme.**

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requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Technology and Learning**

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## **Declaration**

I declare that the work described in this document is, except where otherwise stated, entirely my own work and has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Abstract:**

*The transition of students from primary to secondary school is a difficult time for students. Subsequent to transition, students' academic performance drop and their self-concepts are lessened. This study explored the use of a peer-mentored forum to assist students' transition. The study had three main purposes; (i) To examine whether students would engage with the technology, (ii) To identify what concerns/hopes students' would disclose, (iii) To assess what students' gained from the experience. A case study methodology was used and the resulting data was both descriptive exploratory and descriptive explanatory of the case. The study was conducted between a secondary school and a primary school from where a large number of students' transfer to the secondary school. Both schools were schools rated by the Irish Department of Education and Science as highly disadvantaged. Eighteen students were selected randomly from the primary school and six students were purposefully selected from the secondary school to participate and interact through the use of the forum. The main focus of the study was the eighteen primary school participants. Qualitative data was gathered from forum posts & focus groups. A pre-questionnaire was used to collect initial data and a post-questionnaire was used to gather data subsequent to student participation. The questionnaires were used to support or question the qualitative data collected and for comparison with existing data on the topic of transition to post-primary education. Quantitative data was collected using a database linked to the forum. The results showed that students engaged well with the technology, and that hopes/fears disclosed by the students were mainly consistent with existing literature, but some new topics did arise. It was evident from the collected data that sixth-class students viewed first-year students as experts in relation to the topic of transition and, for this reason; discussions mainly took the form of questions and answers. The results also showed that the primary school students both enjoyed & learned from the experience. Further studies involving schools with different socio-economic circumstances, a more structured forum, & possibly a more extensive website could add further scope to the results.*

# Table of Contents

<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Page</b>
List of Tables & Illustrations.....	1
Abbreviations.....	2
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.1 Research Goals.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.2 Background &amp; Context.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.2.1 Transition Time.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.2.2 Technology.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.2.3 Participant Schools.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.3 Guide to Thesis.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. Literature Review.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2.1 Transition.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2.1.1 School Transitions.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2.1.2 Student Concerns.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.1.3 Difficulties &amp; Recommendations.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2.2 Technology.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.2.1 Young People &amp; Technology.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.2.2 Social Anxiety.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2.2.3 Current Uses of Technology for Transition.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2.3 Communications Technology.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2.3.1 Peer Learning.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2.3.2 Learning through Discussion.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2.4 Summary.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>3. Research Questions.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>3.1 Main Research Question.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>3.2 Sub-Questions.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>4. Design of the Artefact.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>4.1 Deciding on the Artefact.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>4.2 Building the Artefact.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>4.2.1 The Forum.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>4.2.2 The Opening Webpage.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>4.3 Configuring the Forum.....</b>	<b>18</b>

4.4	Facilitating Communication.....	19
4.5	Pilot Testing.....	20
5.	Methodology.....	22
5.1	The Case Study.....	22
5.2	Research Study Procedure.....	23
5.3	Participants.....	24
5.3.1	Participant Selection.....	24
5.3.2	Participant Training.....	24
5.4	Sample Size.....	26
5.5	Data Collection.....	27
5.5.1	Forum Posts.....	27
5.5.2	Questionnaires.....	27
5.5.3	Focus Groups.....	28
5.5.4	Research Diary.....	28
5.5.5	MySQL Database.....	29
5.6	Data Analysis.....	30
5.6.1	Coding.....	30
5.6.2	Comparison.....	32
5.6.3	Triangulation.....	32
5.6.4	Statistics.....	32
5.7	Validity & Reliability.....	32
5.7.1	Validity.....	33
5.7.2	Reliability.....	33
5.8	Pilot Testing.....	34
5.9	Ethics.....	34
6.	Findings and Discussion.....	36
6.1	Did the Participants use the Technology?.....	36
6.1.1	Internet Access & Usage.....	36
6.1.2	Sixth-Class Participant Usage of the Artefact.....	36
6.2	What Concerns/Hopes did the Participants Disclose?....	42
6.2.1	Findings from Pre-Questionnaire.....	42
6.2.2	Analysis of the Emergent Themes from Questions Posted.....	43
6.2.3	Further Discussion.....	49

6.2.4	Analysis of Non-Question Posts.....	50
6.3	Did the Participants Benefit from undergoing the Research Process.....	51
6.3.1	Pre-Questionnaire v Post-Questionnaire.....	51
6.3.2	Further Analysis of Participant Data.....	52
6.4	Limitations of the Research.....	54
6.5	Summary of Findings.....	54
7.	Conclusions.....	56
7.1	Main Findings.....	56
7.2	Suggestions for Further Research.....	56
8.	References.....	58
9.	Appendices.....	63
	Appendix 1: Design Table.....	63
	Appendix 2: Pre-Questionnaire.....	64
	Appendix 3: Post-Questionnaire.....	67
	Appendix 4: Comparison of Pre & Post Questionnaires.....	69
	Appendix 5: Focus Group Questions.....	71
	Appendix 6: Sixth-Class Consent Form.....	72
	Appendix 7: First-Year Consent Form.....	73
	Appendix 8: Parental Consent Forms.....	74
	Appendix 9: Board of Management Consent Forms.....	76
	Appendix 10: Sixth-Class Artefact Usage Statistics.....	78
	Appendix 11: Sixth-Class Non-Question Responses.....	79
	Appendix 12: Sixth-Class Questions (inc. Preliminary Codes)...	80

## List of Tables and illustrations:

	<b>Page</b>
Figure 1a: Screenshot: The Forum.....	17
Figure 1b: Screenshot: Forum Thread.....	17
Figure 2: Screenshot: Artefact Opening Page.....	18
Figure 3: Table: Salmon 5-Step Model (Technical).....	20
Figure 4: Table: Salmon 5-Step Model (E-Moderation).....	26
Figure 5: Snapshot: Page from Research Diary .....	29
Figure 6: Screenshot: Excel Worksheet (Data Analysis).....	31
Figure 7: Flowchart: The Coding Process.....	31
Figure 8: Diagram: Comparison of Data Sets .....	32
Figure 9: Graph: Sixth-Class Login Data .....	37
Figure 10: Graph: Sixth-Class Post Data.....	39
Figure 11: Graph: Sixth-Class Logins per Day: .....	39
Figure 12: Graph: Sixth-Class Post Views(Week2) .....	40
Figure 13: Table: Thread Depths of Forum Posts .....	41
Figure 14: Graph: First-Year Responses(Salmon Model).....	42
Figure 15a: Table: 'New Curriculum' Codes.....	44
Figure 15b: Table: 'Relationship' Codes.....	45
Figure 15c: Table: 'Physical School' Codes.....	46
Figure 15d: Table: 'Rules' Codes.....	47
Figure 15e: Table: 'First Day' Code.....	47
Figure 15f: Table: 'Extra-Curricular' Codes.....	48
Figure 15g: Table: 'Local' Codes.....	49
Figure 16: Table: Coding of Sixth-Class Forum Responses.....	50

**Abbreviations:**

NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
NCTE	National Centre for Technology in Education
Sixth-class	Sixth-Class Participants

## **1 Introduction**

In 2008, 56,228 students enrolled in the first year of secondary school in Ireland (Department of Education and Science, 2008). In 2004, 4.281 million students were enrolled in ninth grade, the first year of secondary school in the United States of America (Gray, Sable & Sietsema, 2006). Transition from primary level to second level education is a crucial time for students due to the emotional, physical and social distress caused by the change from one school to another. Biological changes that young adolescents undergo between the ages of twelve and fourteen, the age of transition, increase stresses around transition time.

Due to limitations on teacher time and time in general due to the strict scheduling of school timetables, for purposes of curriculum fulfilment, current second level - primary level school co-operation is very limited. Furthermore, this time limitation means that school transition programmes as they stand are spaced only over a few days and allow little time for students to get a real feel for their new school.

### **1.1 Research Goals**

In this research study, technology was used to support student transition to secondary school. The study was primarily a student only process with minimal adult involvement. For these reasons the area being researched was relatively new and the aim of this research was to discover;

- (a) If students would engage with the technology,
- (b) What concerns/hopes students would disclose,
- (c) If students would gain any benefit from this intervention.

### **1.2 Background & Context**

Here an introduction to the transition process is given, followed with an introduction to technology and its possible role and the background to the participant schools in the study is also introduced.

#### **1.2.1 Transition Time**

Transferring to secondary school is a crucial time for the young people involved. Secondary schools provide students with a very new school structure and pedagogy (Hawk & Hill, 2004). The comforting role of one familiar teacher is

replaced by a range of specialist teachers, an increase in the demand for academic performance, a larger school population and in addition to this, students are going through the early stages of adolescence which brings with it major developmental challenges(Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2006; Vinson & Harrison, 2006).

It is very important when considering the design of transition programmes that the emphasis not be placed solely on addressing the concerns of the young person. Entering secondary school is also a time of great excitement for students as well as being an anxious time(Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009). It is important that any transfer programme must be based on the positives of the move to a new school and the concerns must be addressed within this positive framework. A positive induction programme for incoming students not only serves to increase the anticipation of new students while relieving their concerns but it also has the additional effect of increasing the positive image of the school within the local community and within families where the value of education is held in little regard

### **1.2.2 Technology**

Currently there are many different transition programmes around the world that are attempting to use technology as the core element in assisting students' transfer into secondary school(see 2.2.3).

Technology usage is growing increasingly in the younger generations and in order to have a more holistic approach to assisting students it is becoming significantly more important that school systems embrace the cultures enjoyed by young people outside of school.

Programmes do exist within primary schools for preparing students for secondary school and secondary schools do have programmes for inducting new students. So, perhaps the place for technology is the void between these existing programmes, the months when students are between schools, and the afternoons, evenings and weekends when students are out of school. A recent report by the NCCA(O'Brien, 2009) recommends a more holistic approach to the transition process between schools, the artefact being researched in this project is designed to be a part of that process but by no means a replacement for it.

### **1.2.3 Participant Schools**

The participants for this study were sixth-class students and first-year students. The first-year students were from a secondary school and the sixth-class students were from a feeder primary school to that secondary school. Both schools are DEIS1 schools. DEIS is a Department of Education and Science initiative for identifying and regularly reviewing levels of disadvantage in schools, DEIS1 schools are schools that have the highest levels of disadvantage (Department of Education and Science, 2005). Issues such as attendance problems, behavioural problems and school retention rates are more common in DEIS schools and are huge criterion for categorising schools within DEIS.

In a comparison of DEIS schools to the national average in reference to health issues it was found that boys in DEIS schools were more likely to engage in risk behaviour (smoking, drinking, anti-social behaviour), they watched on average 2-3 more hours of television per day, they were less likely to report positive perceptions of school and consumed less fruit and vegetables than the national average. Girls in DEIS schools compared well with the national average, the one outstanding difference was that girls in DEIS schools reported to have taken part in bullying more frequently (Molcho, Kelly, Gavin, & Nic Gabhainn, 2008).

## **1.3 Guide to Thesis**

Chapter 2 of this paper is a review of the literature in relation to student transition from primary school to secondary school, how young people use technology, what technology would best suit a transition programme and the learning types supported by this technology. Chapter 3 is a listing of the main research question, and the sub-questions required in order to answer this question. In Chapter 4 a full description of the artefact design process is outlined and this is preceded by a discussion on how the artefact was finally decided upon. Chapter 5 contains a detailed description of the methodology used to carry out the research. In Chapter 6 the findings of this study are detailed and discussed. Chapter 7 will conclude the thesis by outlining the main findings of the research and suggesting where further research can be done.

## **2 Literature Review**

In this chapter literature in relation to the transition of young people into secondary school will first be introduced, followed by a review of literature on young people and technology and finally literature in relation to communications technology will be discussed.

### **2.1 Transition**

It is important to understand the concerns that students have regarding transition to secondary school, and to look at research identifying possible solutions to the problems attached to this phenomenon.

#### **2.1.1 School Transitions**

When undergoing the transition to secondary school young people have to contend with physical and social dislocation(Vinson & Harrison, 2006). The expectations on students once they enter secondary school and this new structure are quite immense(Sebba, 2000). So, it is not surprising that so much research has found that student academic performance and self-concepts suffer after undergoing the transition(Galton, et al., 2003; Lucey & Reay, 2000; O'Brien, 2004; Pratt & George, 2005).

In large-scale studies on transition in the UK both Evangelou, et al.,(2008) and Galton, Gray, & Rudduck(1999) found that an academic dip and students' loss of motivation and enjoyment of school was a major concern. In further studies Hawk & Hill(2004) in New Zealand reported the same academic dip and a drop in self-concepts, and a large-scale study by Le Métais(2003) on International school systems noted the same difficulties for students post transition.

In a study by Tonkin & Watt(2003) conducted across two all girl schools it was found that children who remain in the same educational institution after transition have greater self-concepts and academic performance than those who transfer to different secondary schools.

Many countries such as the USA, the UK and New Zealand have attempted to address the difficulties related to the transition process by introducing middle schools. Hawk & Hill(2004) suggest that the introduction of middle schools actually results in a double transition and the same problems come with each transition. Hawk & Hill (2004) argue that the problems associated with transition are not just due to the age of

the student, but are largely due to the actual process of transition. These conclusions were drawn from studies by Anderman, Maehr, & Midgley(1999) on transition of students to middle school and Mizelle & Irvin(2000) on transition of students from middle school to high school, where both reports indicated similar findings in relation to transition difficulties.

Many studies have shown that transition is both an anxious time, and a time of great excitement for students(Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009; Lucey & Reay, 2000; Naughton, 1998; Smyth, 2009). In a study by Lucey & Reay(2000) it is argued that the anxiety that students experience during transition can be very positive as part of a student's overall developmental process.

### **2.1.2 Student Concerns**

Concerns such as bullying, the inability to handle the increased workload, homework, making friends, the concerns associated with a negative view of the prospective second level school developed within the family unit and the local community, losing friends, getting lost, new teachers and an inevitably new and larger school and peer group come forward repeatedly in studies on transition(Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm, & Splittgerber, 2000; Evangelou, et al., 2008; Galton, et al., 2003; Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2006; Zeedyk, et al., 2003). The aforementioned studies have been produced in different countries and have taken different approaches to methodology and measurement with similar outcomes.

Zeedyk, et al.,(2003) found bullying to be the major concern around transition, an argument supported by Hawk & Hill(2004). In a qualitative study involving 30 male and female participants undertaken by Pratt & George(2005) it suggests that peer acceptance is the greatest concern for students at transition time, O'Brien(2001) suggests that one of the major anxieties suffered by students is the fear of losing their friends. One commonality with the various resulting anxieties is that the greatest difficulties students have involve peer relationships whether it be being bullied, making friends or losing friends. Much research into bullying suggests building social relationships between peers is an effective method to deal with bullying(DeRosier & Marcus, 2005; Oliver & Candappa, 2003).

The main concerns associated with the transition process are not unique to any gender but the extent of these concerns has been shown to encompass gender. It has been found that perceptions of class satisfaction at the time of transition deteriorated

for girls(Ferguson & Fraser, 1998) and alienation was a serious concern for girls more so than boys(Eccles & Midgley, 1989; O'Brien, 2003). In the case of boys, it has been found that aggression increases around the transition period(Pellegrini & Bartini, 2001) and bullying is a major factor surrounding male transition(P. Smith, Madsen, & Moody, 1999).

### **2.1.3 Difficulties & Recommendations**

The need for a longer transition period has been suggested by many researchers(Anderson, et al., 2000; Galton, et al., 1999; O'Brien, 2009). The longer transition would involve work beginning with students in primary school, and continuing into the early stages of secondary school. The main focus of the longer transition, however, has led to much disagreement. Anderson, et al.,(2000) & Galton, et al.,(1999)believe that transition programmes should concentrate on continuity of curriculum and suggest that the anxieties students have in relation to issues other than curriculum and academics are short lived in comparison. This belief is shared in part by Smyth(2009) who found that anxieties, not related to curriculum, are short-lived by five in six students early into beginning the first year of secondary school. On the other hand Pratt & George(2005) argues that continuity of curriculum is not as important as that of peer group, and it is on this that the transition should be focused. Hawk & Hill(2004) maintain that student needs should be put before adult self-interest and suggest that a balance should be struck whereby the transition process should address the decline in learning achievement, and the social and emotional support required by students, at an equal level. Extensive transition programmes not only improve pass rates but also improve retention rates of pupils in schools(Hawk & Hill, 2004).

Evangelou, et al.,(2008) noted that existing transition programmes tended to be teacher-led and the students had to fit into a pre-designed programme. Galton, et al.,(2003) recommended that transition programmes should be the result of a consultation process between the primary schools, secondary schools, parents, local community groups and the students that have undergone the process and those that are about to. At the present moment teachers globally are very much stretched(Angle, Gilby, & Belcher, 2007; Ingvarson, 2005) and co-ordinating programmes between primary teachers and secondary teachers can be very difficult.

Current transition programmes include information sharing between schools, visits of students to their prospective secondary schools, visits of teachers from second level schools to primary schools, and information leaflets (Evangelou, et al., 2008; Galton, et al., 1999). These programmes can take up a lot of staff time and can be expensive.

Zeedyk, et al., (2003) noted, in a study based on questionnaires filled in by teachers, parents and students, that teachers rarely mentioned students' individual ability but rather what can be done by the institution in relation to transition. This can create a helplessness on the part of the students. Much has been recommended in relation to the student role in transition. Galton, et al., (2003) claimed that 'being a year older matters', and that pupils are more willing to consult friends rather than ask teachers questions. In an earlier study Galton, et al., (1999) suggested that students need to be able to ask questions and receive answers. Smyth, (2009) found in support of this that students can be reluctant to talk to teachers around sensitive issues such as bullying and making friends, and suggests that peer mentoring would be a good way to address student concerns.

## **2.2 Technology**

Can transition programmes offer students the opportunity to control their learning needs? Fielding, (2001) suggests just this, that students have the power to control their own learning if they are given the freedom to. Technology can allow students to interact in an online environment where, although supervision is present, supervisors are not openly seen to be there by the students. In order to ensure that the technology used can be useful to the students involved it is important to examine how students use technology.

### **2.2.1 Young People & Technology**

In a study conducted in 2005 (Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005) it was found that 87% of American teenagers use the internet, 51% of that cohort used the internet on a daily basis. A related study at the time found that teenagers use of the internet was primarily social (Marsh, Brooks, Hughes & Ritchie, 2005).

More recently in Ireland, Ó Brian & Nitting-Fulin (2009) found that 94% of children aged 9-16 have a PC or computer at home and only 3% of children aged 13-16 said that they did not have access to a PC at home. Of the 94%, 95% of that

grouping said that they also had access to the internet at home. 84% of 13-16 year olds said that they use the internet on a weekly basis and 67% of 9-12 year olds said likewise. This analysis of computer usage amongst young people in Ireland found that 60% of the young people used the internet to play games, 51% to download music, 48% using social network sites(Bebo, Myspace) and 43% said that they use the internet for doing homework.

### **2.2.2 Social Anxiety**

Does using the internet have a negative effect on the social life of the individual?

There is an argument put forward that a high level of internet usage is associated with high levels of loneliness(Moody, 2001) and a decrease in an individuals social networks results from a significant amount of time spent online(Kraut, et al., 1998). However, contrasting research argues that through using the internet individuals can build highly developed online relationships(Parks & Floyd, 1995).

In other studies it has been found that socially anxious children will use the internet more for reasons of anonymity which makes it easier for them to interact online(Shepherd & Edelmann, 2005) and introverts become much more active online, whereas extroverts who thrive on a noisy atmosphere may fade out to some extent(Paloff & Pratt, 1999).

### **2.2.3 Current Uses of Technology for Transition**

In Perth a secondary school is using Wikispaces in order to assist primary students in their transition to secondary school(Perth & Kinross Council 2009). In England videoconferencing using Skype technology is being used to facilitate the transition process(Futurelab, 2007).

## **2.3 Communications Technology**

Communications technology such as forums and chatrooms support constructivist learning activity. Constructivism is a learning approach whereby people actively construct knowledge. Learners use previous experience to construct a subjective view of an objective reality(Piaget, 1967).

Discussing subjects with other people can transform how we process existing information(Vygotsky, 1978). Bates,(1995) describes the construction of personal meaning as a product of interaction and not an individual construction. Can then forum technology be used to allow pre-transition students to talk to each other and explore the different areas of concern that they have? Research into forum technology has found that there is a need for moderators or teachers to scaffold the process in order to achieve the best possible results(Chen-Chung Liu & Chin-Chung Tsai, 2008). Where studies have shown that the more instructors posted, the shorter the discussions(Mazzolini & Maddison, 2003), this says nothing about the quality of those discussions.

Bullying stands out as one of the greatest concerns held by students pre-transition(Evangelou, et al.,2008). Literature on the subject of bullying argues that consultation with students regarding bullying and building social relationships is a best practice approach to alleviating the problem(see 2.1.1).

### **2.3.1 Peer Learning**

Peer learning is a process by which students share their own understandings of a topic in a reciprocal partnership and together develop their own individual knowledge on the topic(Keppell, Au, Ma, Chan, 2006). The giving and receiving of explanations between peers is very positively related to achievement in learning(Webb N, 1982). Peer learning has been shown through research to increase self-esteem among participants, as well as improving academic performance and giving people a more positive social outlook (Damon, 1984)

Communities of practice(Lave &Wenger, 1991) suggests that learning between peers must be an organised practice, and is enhanced by the existence of a scaffold for learning created by more expert practitioners in a facilitators role. This idea is supported by Tolmie, et al., (2005) where it was found that adult guidance in online discussions achieved better learning outcomes than unscaffolded peer discussion, but the learning outcomes were greater still for scaffolded peer discussion. More expert practitioners need not be teachers but can indeed be older students. Older siblings especially play a mentoring role with their younger siblings and are therefore not too emotionally young to mentor others(Brody, Kim, Murry, & Brown, 2003). This practise of peer learning with more expert facilitation lends itself to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development for enhanced learning(Vygotsky, 1978).

Harris' Group Socialisation Theory suggests that children first identify with a group consisting of their peers(Harris, 1998), an idea consistent with Vygotsky(1978). Studies have shown that peer mentors can be more effective than authoritative mentors(Patterson, Dishion, & Yoerger, 2000) and that students prefer peer mentors as discussion leaders in place of instructors or teachers(Rourke & Anderson, 2002). One notable arena to be aware of in peer learning is that when students are asked to formally assess each other as part of the process, the learning can be greatly inhibited(Keppell, et al.,2006).

### **2.3.2 Learning through Discussion**

Learning through discussion is a collaborative learning practice. Dillenbourg,(1999) describes collaborative learning as a process where two or more people attempt to learn something or construct knowledge between them. Both face-to-face and online discussion have shown positive learning for students and higher order thinking(Ellis, Calvo, Levy, & Tan, 2004) with studies showing a close association between the two discussion mediums(Ellis, Goodyear, Prosser, & O'Hara, 2006).

Online discussions among students may avoid dysfunctional social-psychological influences that exist in face-to-face discussions and enhance deliberation(Ho & McLeod, 2008). However, Guiller, Durndell, & Ross,(2008)found that although students were better able to make use of evidence in argumentation in online discussions, face-to-face discussion proved to be more effective for establishing shared meaning. Thomas,(2002) argues that an online asynchronous discussion due to its non-linear branching style is not representative of a conversational mode of learning, although this research does agree that evidence of higher order thinking was evident amongst participants.

It has been argued that peer discussion enhances understanding even when none of the students in the discussion group know the correct answer(M. Smith, et al., 2009) and that discussion between students online or face-to-face leads to better results than individual learning(Ellis, et al.,2006). It must be noted that even though it has been argued that students enjoy asynchronous learning through forums, this does not necessarily say anything about the quality of the discussions(Vonderwell, Liang, & Alderman, 2007). Although the above studies were undertaken with third level

participants, Albright,(2002)demonstrated that students at primary level achieve higher order thinking through discussion when given a relevant discussion stimulus.

## **2.4 Summary**

The concerns associated with the transition from primary education to secondary education can be largely attributed to social anxieties, fear of the unknown. It is important that the issues that students have are addressed adequately. Transition periods need to be ran over a longer space of time and technology offers this solution, in addition to this young people of transition age are already using computers to a large degree in their lives both in school and out of school.

Online communications technology has a great benefit when dealing with the topic of transition, students can be offered a certain degree of anonymity, allowing more socially anxious students to participate more. Online discussions also allow participants time to think of their answers and the pressures associated with this situation in a face-to-face discussion are alleviated.

Peer mentoring is of great benefit because young people identify more closely with their peers. Young people are also more comfortable speaking with their peers than adults.

### **3 Research Questions**

The main research question and the sub-questions required in order to answer it are specified below.

#### **3.1 Main Research Question**

Can a peer-mentored forum be used to support sixth-class students in their transition from primary school to secondary school?

#### **3.2 Sub-Questions**

Did the participants use the technology?

What concerns/hopes did the participants disclose?

Did the participants benefit from undergoing the research process?

#### **4 Design of the Artefact**

When it came to designing the website artefact Nielsen(1999) was used as a benchmark to ensure that best practices for website development were used so that students found the artefact enjoyable and easy to use. The details of the artefact design are outlined in the text below. This research is examining one potential role of technology in assisting part of the overall transition process. The five main design points are listed below;

- (a) Provide a communications technology.
- (b) Allow peer-to-peer interaction.
- (c) Scaffold the artefact.
- (d) Focus the participants' discussion.
- (e) Create anonymous usernames to encourage interaction by all participants.

A complete design table is contained in appendix 1.

##### **4.1 Deciding on the Artefact**

Deciding upon a final artefact involved many considerations including what technology best suited the participants' needs for learning and what technology best suited the participants as regards access and user-friendliness. The artefact had to allow students to communicate with each other through peer-peer discussion. For this reason the decision was made that the final artefact would be a communications technology.

Communications technologies can offer both synchronous and asynchronous platforms for interaction between users.

Synchronous communication technologies, such as chatrooms, are attractive in that they offer real-time conversations. The difficulty with this is that it can be very difficult to moderate without impacting upon the real-time advantages of the technology. For this reason, it was decided not to allow synchronous communication between participants.

Asynchronous communications technologies, such as forums, have different advantages in that they allow a much greater level of reflective response(Vonderwell, et al., 2007) and are easier to moderate. The main difficulty with many asynchronous technologies available is that they contain advertisements or links to inappropriate

material. In addition, the NCTE control access to websites in primary schools and many popular communications technologies are not allowed.

PHP Bulletin Board (phpBB) was chosen as the open-source forum software to use. 'PhpBB' is a popular open-source software that does not contain advertisements, is easy to use and can be fully incorporated into an existing website with no external link required. An opening page was also designed to link to the forum.

Although additional information and activities such as games and school links could have made the site more attractive and appealing to the participants it was decided to keep the site as simple as possible so as not to distort the data collected.

## **4.2 Building the Artefact**

The artefact was a website. The two main elements of the website were an opening page and a forum that links from the opening page. The forum was set up with students having the options of starting a new topic or responding to an existing post. Once the artefact was designed and uploaded to the internet, the NCTE were contacted and given access to the website, the site was approved after inspection.

### **4.2.1 The Forum**

In order to build the forum it was first necessary to download the phpBB software from [www.phpBB.com](http://www.phpBB.com). This downloaded software was then copied to 'Dreamweaver', a website design software package. A site was established within 'Dreamweaver' for the forum.

Prior to uploading the forum site from 'Dreamweaver' onto the server, a database had to be created. MySQL was the database software chosen. During initial testing there were difficulties with the server that contained the database, resulting in the site uploading very slowly. The address of the website was also a cause for concern (see 4.5). To address these issues the domain name [www.movingschools.com](http://www.movingschools.com) was purchased, an address much more fitting for the research topic, and easier to remember for the participants. Webspace was also purchased at this point, and the MySQL database was transferred to this space. Once the database had been transferred, the forum was uploaded.

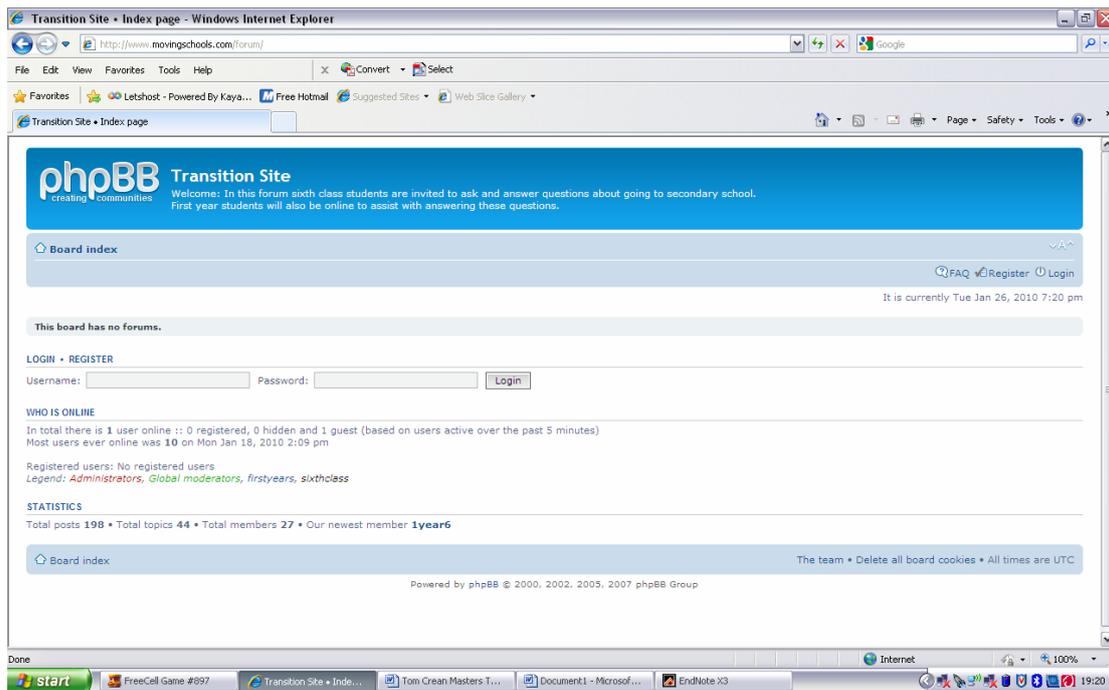


Figure 1a: Screenshot: A view of the front page of the Forum.

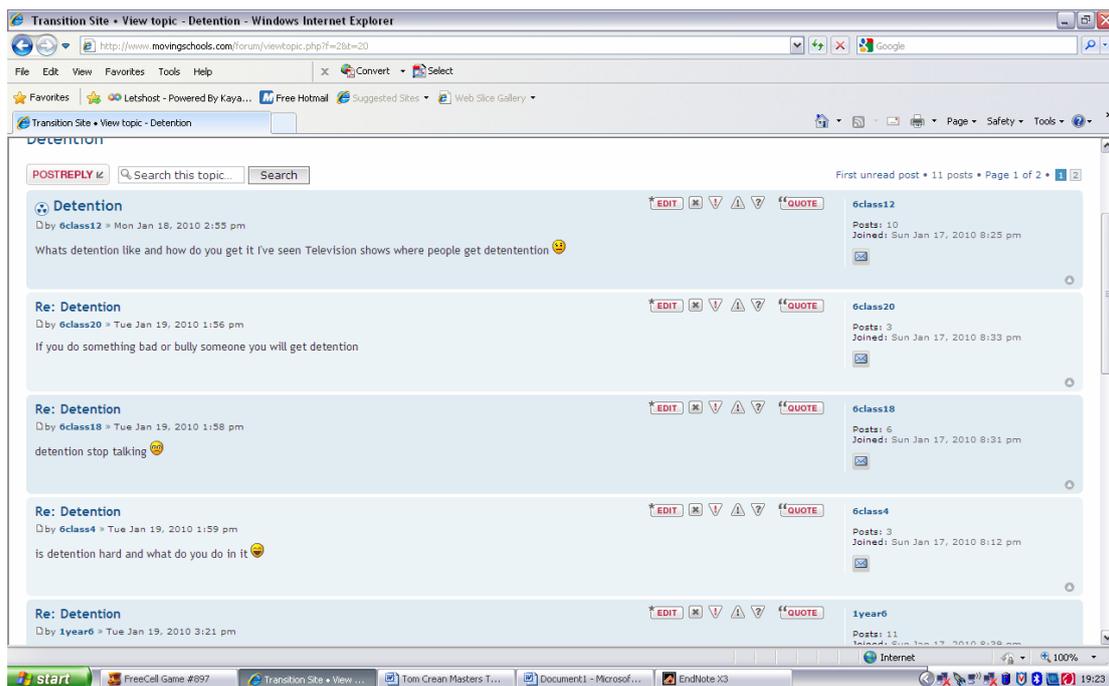


Figure 1b: Screenshot: A view of a forum thread

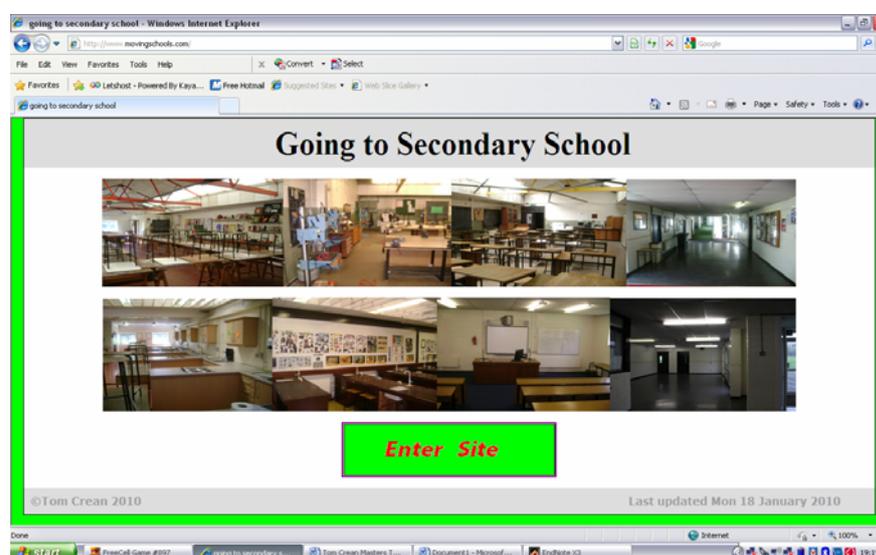
It was important that the forum would be attractive to the participants of the study and also easy to use.

To make the basic forum more attractive the colour coding was changed and information relevant to the participants was placed in the forum title block. The

setting up of the forum for participant functionality is described later in this chapter(See 4.3).

## 4.2.2 The Opening Webpage

An opening webpage was designed using 'Dreamweaver'. The entry webpage was designed to provide pictures of the secondary school, that the students would be entering, in order to provide a stimulus for the forum discussion similar to the idea used to stimulate student discussion among children in a classroom(Albright, 2002). It was also to keep student discussion focused on the topic of transition.



**Figure 2: Screenshot: The Opening Page of the Artefact**

The opening webpage was also designed to be attractive to students. The webpage contains many small graphics depicting images of the secondary school. The header and footer were kept to minimal size and instructions on the opening page were kept as brief as possible with only necessary guidelines noted. The page was colourful for contextual content but background content was kept simple and colour was intended to be background and dulled.

## 4.3 Configuring the Forum

Many considerations had to be made with regards to the final forum. Some were made to ensure that the forum was easy to use and others to keep participants focused on the discussion of transition. One big decision was not to break

the forum up into sub-sections. This was done in order that the students could freely express concerns without being influenced by pre-defined headings, and is consistent with the communication style of Bebo and Facebook (popular social networking sites used by participant age group).

The following decisions were made with regard to the functionality of the forum;

1. **Posting:** Participants were given full access to forum posts, they were allowed to read all posts and reply to any existing post. Students were allowed to start new topics. To maintain this open asynchronous community participants were not allowed to use private messaging. All postings were set to pass to the researcher for approval.

2. **Personal profiles:** Participants were allowed to use avatars should they choose. They were also allowed to change their passwords but they were not given permissions to change their usernames.

3. **Actions:** Participants were unable to e-mail topics or posts. They were also not given permissions to delete or edit their own posts once they had posted them. Participants were informed of how they could contact the researcher if they did wish for any of their posts to be deleted or edited, or if any other issues arose during participation.

4. **Content:** Participants could only upload avatars that they had on their own computers. They could upload attachments also. As all posts had to pass through the researcher, this ensured that attachments and avatars could be previewed before they went online.

#### **4.4 Facilitating Communication**

A variation of Salmon's model for building online communities was used as the model to assist in building the online community for this research (Salmon, 1999). As the research to a large extent dealt with student anxiety, a sensitive topic, students were given anonymity. This anonymity afforded to the students did present difficulties with using the Salmon model to its fullest extent, but it was necessary as anonymity has been shown to allow participants to communicate more freely (Shepherd & Edelman, 2005). The forum as mentioned above was kept as simple as possible in respect to design and an easy to use forum type (phpBB) was used in order that the technology would not alienate students. The 5-step model has

two unique elements, a technical support aspect (See Figure 3) and an e-moderation aspect(See 5.3.2).

Both first-year participants and sixth-class participants were trained in the use of the forum and the roles expected of them were detailed in this training process(See 5.3.2).

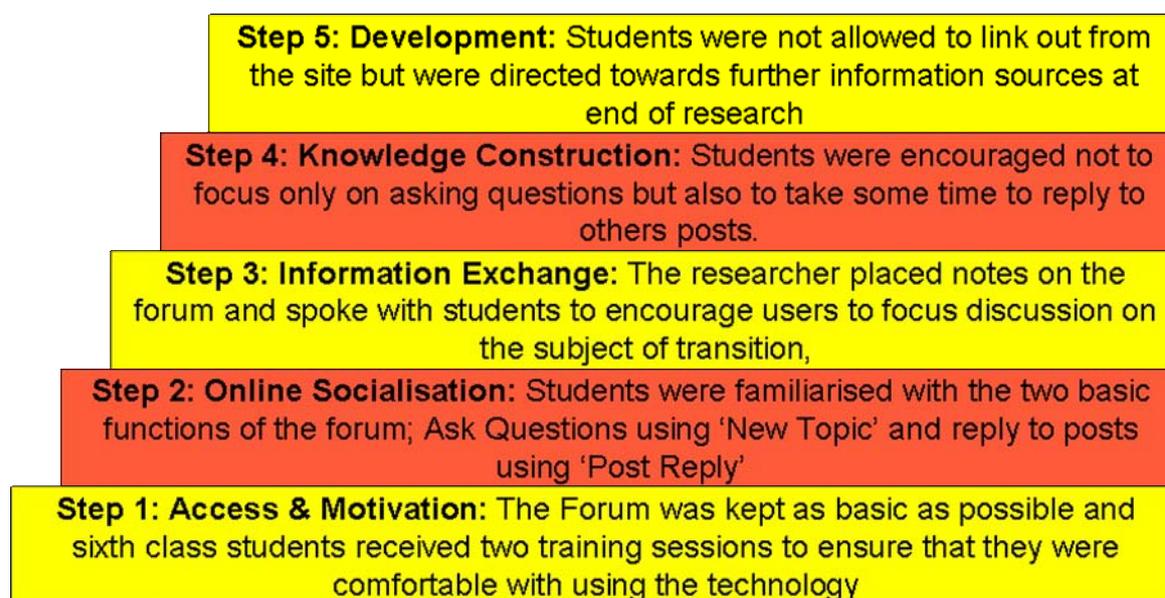


Figure 3: Table: The technical support aspect of the Salmon 5 step Model

#### 4.5 Pilot Testing

The artefact was originally pilot tested with students of a similar demographic to that of the actual participants, another DEIS1 school in the same area. The artefact was also tested by adults familiar with forum technology in the event that some of the actual participants might prove to be more expert than their peers used for the pilot.

Suggestions for the opening page of the site that resulted from the pilot testing were; more colourful pictures should be used, students should be in the pictures and that the school name should be used. The rest of the feedback was positive towards the existing page. Following the feedback more colourful pictures were used, but for ethical reasons pictures with students could not be used and the school name was not placed on the website.

Suggestions for the forum were; the phpBB logo should be changed, students should be allowed to upload avatars, students should be allowed to use their e-mail addresses for contact reasons and first year students should be given greater freedom

with their forum permissions than sixth class students. The rest of the feedback was positive towards the existing forum. In response to the feedback students were allowed to upload avatars, but this was on a trial basis dependent on whether or not this took students attention away from the main aim of the forum. The phpBB logo was not changed for copyright reasons. Student e-mail addresses were not used for ethical reasons, all contact with students was through their school or through their parents. It was decided that both first-year participants and sixth-class participants would keep the same permissions so as not to create a divide between the participants, and in order to keep student access to the forum as minimal as required for effective functionality.

For the overall set up of the artefact the feedback was very positive. One major reservation expressed by the pilot testers was that the site uploaded very slowly and that the address of the site [www.cs.tcd.ie/~creant/transition](http://www.cs.tcd.ie/~creant/transition) was too lengthy and difficult to remember(See 4.2.1).

## **5 Methodology**

In this chapter the type of study conducted will first be introduced, followed by details of the study procedure and information on participant selection and training. Data collection methods and methods for data analysis will then be described in detail & the chapter will be concluded with details of the procedures underwent in order to ensure validity, reliability and a high standard of ethics for this study.

### **5.1 The Case Study**

A case study was chosen as the best way in which to conduct this research. Yin (2008) described a case study as a great method to use when wanting to find out how and why some social phenomenon works, Gerring(2007) stated that we get a better understanding of the whole by focusing on a key part. Miles (1979) argues that the case study method is not a sufficient research method for obtaining proper research data. Yin(2008) asserts that once a detailed case study protocol is followed , the case study method is a sufficient research method for obtaining good quality research.

This study used a single case. Students from a DEIS1 primary school were provided with a forum in which they were given the opportunity to discuss any issues they had in relation to transition with students from the secondary school that they will be transferring to, also DEIS1. This case was chosen for the study for a number of reasons, the researcher had sufficient access to potential data, access to participants for interview and document review and the researcher was in a position to keep a research diary, all important requirements for a good case study(Gerring, 2007; Yin, 2008). The case study was mainly a descriptive explanatory study as McMillan & Schumacher (2006) would qualify it, but because student conversation was not restricted to given topics there was a certain descriptive exploratory element to the study. As there has been no research conducted on peer-peer interaction using communications technology for transition programmes, it was decided not to use pre-defined discussion topics, but instead to allow students to bring up any topics of their choosing.

## **5.2 Research Study Procedure**

The following case study protocol was used to implement this research study;

### **November 2009**

- 1) The Artefact was built.
- 2) The questions for the questionnaires were decided upon.
- 3) The Artefact and the questions were pilot tested, and relevant changes were subsequently made to both.

### **December 2009**

- 4) Participants were selected.
- 5) Participants completed a pre-questionnaire.

### **January 2010**

- 6) Participants were trained in how to use the technology and given details as to what was expected of them.(18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> January, 9 participants each day).
- 7) Participants were given unique passwords and access to the artefact on the above dates.
- 8) Participants were allowed use the artefact for three weeks 24/7.
- 9) Two further in-school classes were conducted (29<sup>th</sup> January and 4<sup>th</sup> February).
- 10) Data from the forum was recorded using MySQL.

### **February 2010**

- 11) Participants completed a post-questionnaire.
- 12) Pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire data was compared.
- 13) Preliminary analysis was done on forum data.
- 14) Focus group questions were designed.
- 15) Focus groups were conducted, influenced by preliminary data on forum analysis and questionnaires.
- 16) Data from the forum posts and focus groups were coded.
- 17) All data once analysed was compared with the findings from previous relevant literature.
- 18) Data from different sources were compared for validity.

### **5.3 Participants**

There were two distinct groups of participants for this study. One group of participants were the subject of the study and the other groups' role was to assist the former group. Eighteen sixth-class students were selected from primary school A, a feeder primary school to secondary school A. Six first-year students were selected from secondary school A.

#### **5.3.1 Participant Selection**

The sixth-class participants were selected using a combination of sampling processes. Forty-seven students from primary school A will be attending secondary school A. These forty-seven students were spread through four sixth-classes. In order to minimise classroom disruption during 'Site Usage' and 'Focus Groups', the eighteen students were spread through the four sixth-classes, four students were selected from two of the classes and five from the remaining two. This was purposeful sampling for reasons of practicality and not purposeful sampling in its usual context in qualitative research as Patton (2002) would classify it. The students from each class group were then chosen through a process of simple random sampling (Sirkin, 2005) with each student in the class that will be attending secondary school A having an equal chance of being selected. Participants were chosen randomly using random number generation for each class.

The six first-year students from secondary school A were chosen using a purposeful sampling process (Patton, 2002), participants were chosen based on qualities considered desirable for good mentors (Rowley, 1999), these being commitment, non-judgemental, instructional competence, good interpersonal skills, hopefulness and a continuous learner. The candidates were chosen through a process of consultation with class teachers, the year head, and the researcher.

#### **5.3.2 Participant Training**

Sixth-class students: The students were given two half-hour technical training inductions before participation in the research and a thirty minute information session on the research project. In the first induction the eighteen students, taken in 4 separate groups, based on school class, were given a thirty minute introduction to using phpBB and were invited to sample the program and ask any questions that they may have had. In the second induction students were given

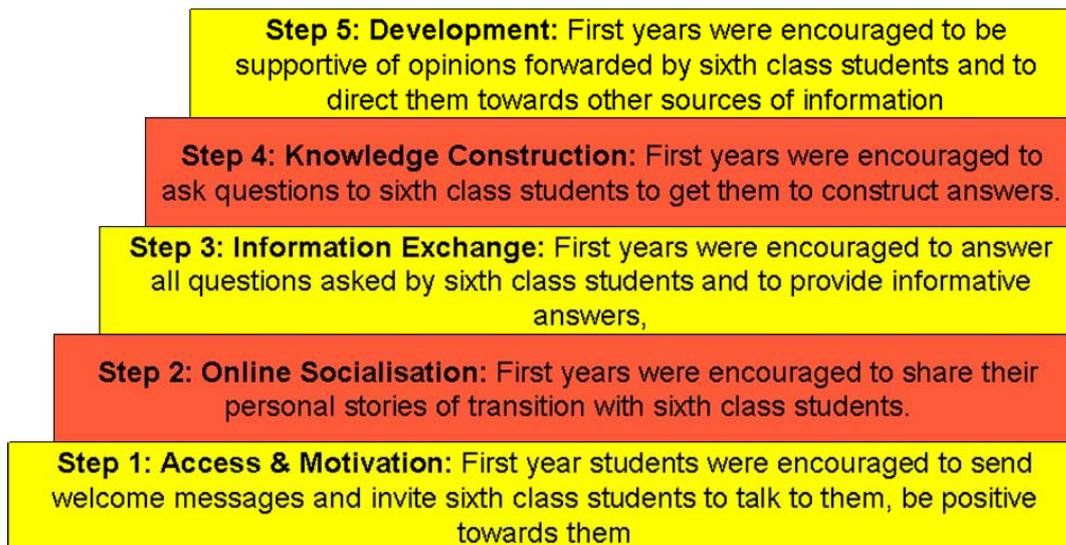
password access to the artefact and allowed to go online and practice using the actual forum designed for this research. All eighteen students received a username, the usernames ranged from 6class1 to 6class20, a username beginning with 6 to identify the user on the forum as a sixth-class student. 6class1 to 6class10 were female, and 6class11 to 6class20 were male. Once again any questions that the students had were answered at this point. During the information session on the research project the details of the project and what was expected of the students were outlined, the rules of the forum usage were explained to the students and any questions they had at this stage were addressed.

After this initial training, students were told that they could use the artefact at any time 24/7 over a three week period. Students had two main options within the forum, they could

- (1) Start a 'New Topic' – ask a question or start a discussion thread.
- (2) 'Post Reply' – participants could reply to any posting within the forum.

Sixth-class participants were simply told that the forum was a place where they could ask any questions they had about transition, and post replies to assist other students' with their questions. No further guidelines were given to sixth class students as regards what they could post. They were given a list of what was not allowed within the forum.

First year students: The students were given the task of supporting and building the online community with the sixth class students following a variation of Salmons' 5-step model for building an online community(Salmon, 1999). In two forty minute sessions the 6 students were introduced to the 5-step model and given instructions on how to implement these steps(Figure 4). First-years were given the usernames 1year1 to 1year6, the initial 1 indicating that the username belongs to a first year.



**Figure 4: Table: The E-moderation aspect of the Salmon 5 Step Model**

#### **5.4 Sample Size**

With qualitative case study analysis there is no fixed sample size, some cases may have one participant and others many more (Yin, 2008), whereas equations exist for the decision on sample size for quantitative analysis which are not necessary here as the research is based mainly on qualitative data. For this study, eighteen sixth-class participants were chosen representing 38% of the students transferring to secondary school A and six first-year participants were chosen. The number eighteen was chosen for sixth-class students for two reasons, firstly on examining other research the expected amount of data that eighteen students would generate over a three week period should have been sufficient for analysis in the short time frame allowed for this research project, secondly by using simple random sampling to select participants the probability of getting a good cross section representative of the overall sample is sufficient (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Sirkin, 2005). Six first-year students were chosen, once again to restrict the amount of data that would be generated in time for detailed analysis and secondly to maintain a 3:1 ratio of mentors to mentees, a tight ratio similar to that used in previous peer mentor research (Rourke & Anderson, 2002). In this particular study the mentors were not assigned to mentees and all twenty four participants interacted with each other freely.

## **5.5 Data Collection**

Qualitative data was collected from forum posts, focus groups & a research diary. Pre and post-questionnaires were used to establish student viewpoints, and quantitative data was recorded using a database linked to the forum.

### **5.5.1 Forum Posts**

The questions and replies on the forum were all gathered into an excel worksheet where they were then analysed. Hewitt(2005) argues that thread depth can be important, but it is also important to remember thread depth does not indicate quality of communication. Cheung & Hew(2005) and Guzdial(1997) found that students sometimes are content just to ask and answer questions and so single discussion threads can be quite common. The forum posts were collected into the excel worksheet hierarchically so as to allow for thread depths to be considered(see Figure 6).

### **5.5.2 Questionnaires**

Sixth-class participants were given a pre-questionnaire and a post-questionnaire. Both questionnaires were very similar and designed to uncover where the students stood on issues prior to, and subsequent to, participation in the research. The pre-questionnaire(Appendix 2) contained extra questions relating to students' use of technology, and the post-questionnaire(Appendix 3) contained extra questions relating to students' use of the artefact. The questionnaires were designed based on questionnaire guidelines from the Dillman,(2007) book on designing questions. The pre-questionnaire could possibly be seen as leading the students to certain topics. For this reason every care was taken to minimise this by using relevant literature on the topic of leading questions as a guide(Kvale, 1996) and a Likert scale was used to obtain student response(Likert, 1974). As the pre-questionnaire questions did appear to be leading questions two pilot tests were ran where the questions were asked in different contexts, but the results were the same. The pre-questionnaire was given to students three weeks prior to them using the artefact, this further decreased the likelihood of the questionnaire leading students within the forum. The pre-questionnaire was designed based on research into transition programmes such as Graham & Hill,(2003) & Evangelou et al.,(2008).

### **5.5.3 Focus Groups**

Krueger Richard & Anne,(1994) argue that focus groups “tap into human tendencies. Attitudes and perceptions relating to concepts, products, services or programs are developed in part by interaction with other people”. It was decided, due to the fact that the researcher works in the schools, that the participants attend focus groups. Interviews could lead to students presenting answers that they think the researcher would like them to give, as children are used to taking cues from adults and are very susceptible to giving answers that they see as being sought(Haugaard & Reppucci, 1992). Focus groups also give participants more opportunity to assemble their thoughts and ideas. Krueger & Casey(2008) note that children have a natural tendency to disclose things about themselves, but can through socialisation, learn the value of dissemblance. The questions used in the focus groups were semi-structured as described by McMillan & Schumacher(2006), there was a pre-determined interview guide(Appendix 5) but questions were open ended and expanded upon by the focus group facilitator where necessary. Five focus groups were run in total. Three focus groups were run with sixth-class students a few days after participants had completed using the artefact. Two further focus groups were run after initial data analysis of the forum posts, one with sixth-class participants and one with first-year participants, to probe further some of the results of that analysis. Krueger & Casey(2008) was used as a guide to structuring the focus groups. The focus groups were recorded using audio recording technology and the resulting audio file was transcribed.

### **5.5.4 Research Diary**

As the researcher works in the schools where the study was being conducted a research diary was a very valuable tool for recording any contact that participants, parents or school staff made with the researcher in relation to the study. The research diary was also used to make notes and observations after class sessions with participants and after focus groups. The research diary was designed in advance of participant selection and the diagram below shows the structure that diary entries took(see Figure 5)

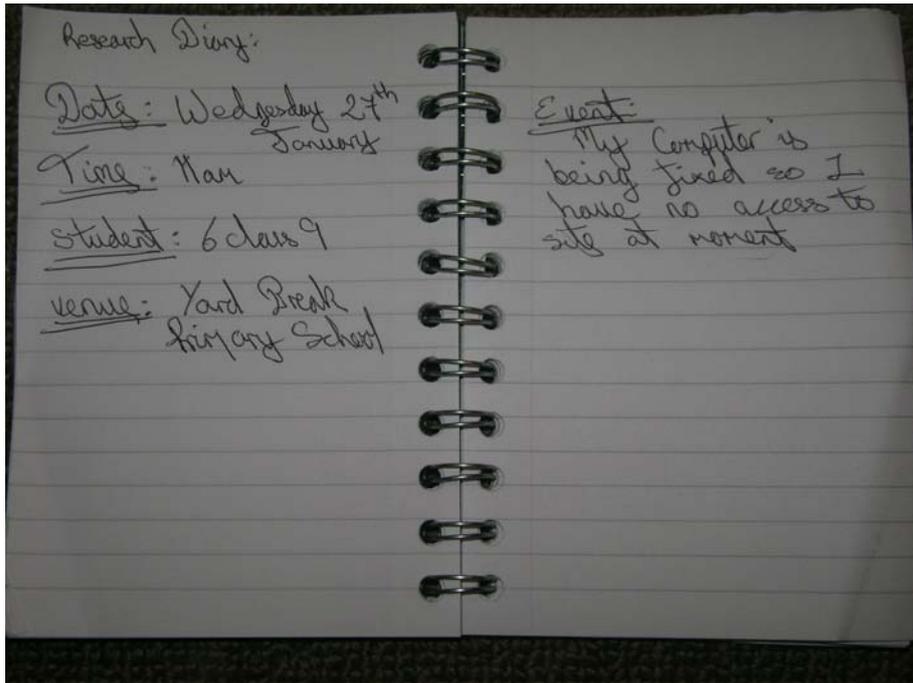


Figure 5: Snapshot: A sample page from the research diary

### 5.5.5 MySQL Database

All traffic through the forum was captured in a MySQL database. The database recorded details of all interaction between the forum and the research participants. Within the database exact dates and times of participant logins, participant posts and all topics viewed by participants were recorded. One downside of the database used for this research project was that it did not record how many times a participant viewed a topic, but only which topics the users had viewed. Only the most recent time that users viewed a topic was recorded. Collection of viewing data was very important to identify 'lurkers', participants who logged in but did not post. The support materials on the phpBB website did recognise and warn users of the technology that the presence of Bots in forums can sometimes result in distortion of the information captured in the database. To ensure that the data was valid and not corrupted the researcher monitored the usage of the forum very closely and compared data from the database regularly with previous data sets and data from controlled usage of the forum. The only data irregularity noted through these extensive tests was that data of posts viewed by users was not being recorded but each day as new data arrived some of the older data was being lost from the records(See 6.1.2 (c)).

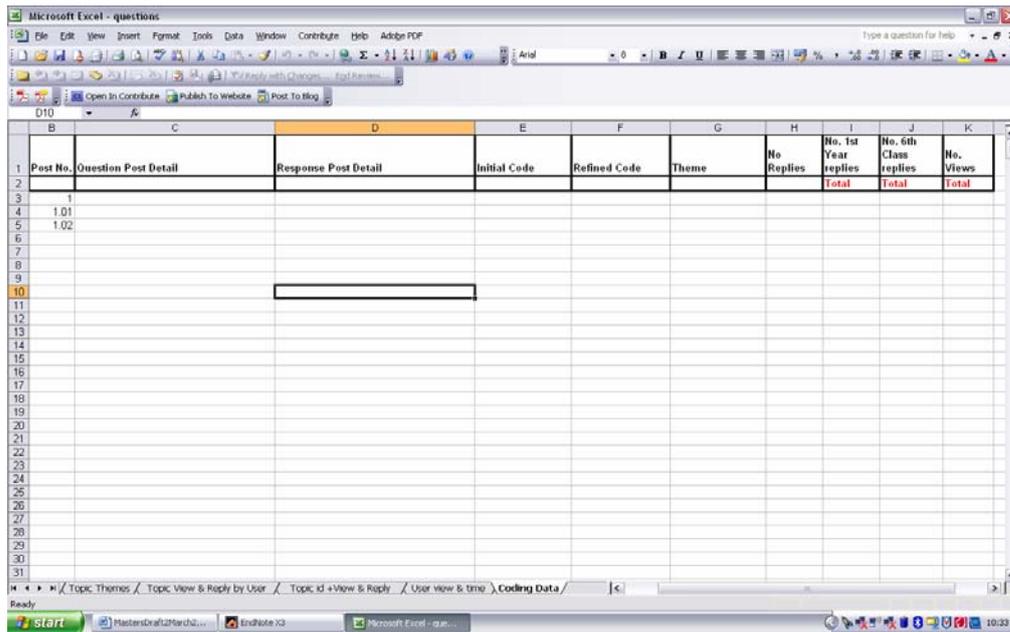
## **5.6 Data Analysis**

The data analyzed was in a small part quantitative but to a much larger extent qualitative. Fishbein & Ajzen,(1975) state that “attitude is an important concept that is often used to understand and predict people’s reaction to an object or change and how behaviour can be influenced”. For this qualitative study it was attitudes and opinions of participants being pursued in the focus groups and on the forum. Henerson, Morris, & Fitz-Gibbon,(1987) put forward the argument that attitudes can be difficult to analyse. Dyer,(1995) argues that “attitude scales do not need to be factually accurate they simply need to reflect one possible perception of the truth”. Four methods of data analysis were employed for this study in order to analyse and compare data effectively.

### **5.6.1 Coding**

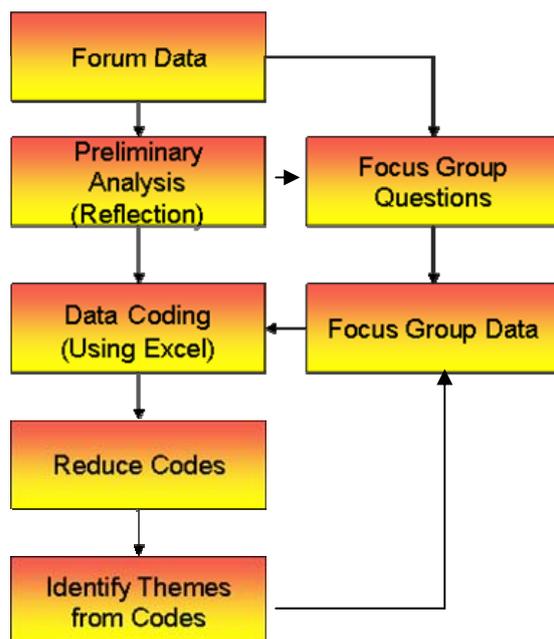
Data collected from participant usage of the forum and data from transcribed focus groups were analysed by coding. The coding process used was adopted from Creswell,(2002) & Tesch,(1990). (See Figure 7).

The coding was done by hand to integrate the researcher further with the data(Creswell, 2008), the analysis ‘starts with reading all the data repeatedly to achieve immersion and obtain a sense of the whole’(Tesch,1990). Data was collected from the forum and transferred to an excel worksheet(Figure 6). Hewitt(2005) stated that every post after a question is a reply, and hierarchically linked. The forum posts were collected into the excel worksheet hierarchically so as to allow for thread depths to be considered. Excel also offers the facility to sort data, once coding had been done data was systematically sorted and analysed from different perspectives.



**Figure 6: Screenshot: The excel worksheet used for data analysis**

The transcripts of the focus groups were coded to coincide with the coding used on the forum post data. After this the codes were further considered and reduced to a smaller amount of codes. Once the final codes had emerged from the data they were categorised into overall themes. The questions posted by sixth-class participants were coded separately to the non-question posts by sixth-class participants. Some questions/responses were categorised in more than one code.



**Figure 7: Flowchart: The coding process used to qualify qualitative data**

### 5.6.2 Comparison

Topics in relation to transition that arose during participant usage of the forum, through focus groups and questionnaires were compared with published data on transition programme research to examine to what extent the data compliments existing data, and conversely to examine whether new issues may arise that have not emerged in published data or have emerged with different results. Data from the pre and post-questionnaires were also compared with regard to individual participants.

### 5.6.3 Triangulation

Data from the forum postings and the focus groups were compared with each other and compared with data from the research diary and the questionnaires in order to represent arguments by looking at data from different perspectives. This process involved the identification of common threads in the different data sets and using one data set to support another(See Figure 8).

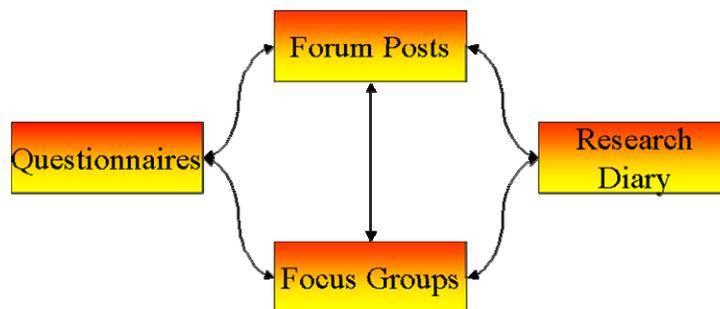


Figure 8: Diagram: Data sets to be compared

### 5.6.4 Statistics

Data obtained from the MySQL database was recorded and sorted into data tables. Graphs were then used to graphically depict the data. Different data sets were examined in relation to each other and in relation to data collected from the forum and the research diary to ensure that the data was consistent.

## 5.7 Validity & Reliability

Becker,(1958) stated that because case study researchers must understand the issues that they are researching prior to commencement of the study, these researchers are prone to a preconceived position on the outcome of the research. In order to address this issue, and the conflict of interest that exists on the part of the

researcher, steps were taken to ensure validity and reliability of this research. A process of reflexivity was maintained by the researcher following Pillow's four validated strategies for reflexivity; recognition of self, recognition of others, the truth, and transcendence(Pillow, 2003).

### **5.7.1 Validity**

In order to ensure validity of the data consistent with requirements for validity based on the work of Yin(2008), Gerring(2007) and McMillan & Schumacher(2006), the following steps were taken:

(1) Construct validity: Data obtained from different collection methods were triangulated to ensure that there were no discrepancies. Data collected was reviewed with the informants before that data was presented to ensure that it was correctly interpreted.

(2) External Validity: The findings from the research were compared with existing relevant research. In addition to this, four professional observers were asked to assess data from the forum before it was presented. The observers were the principal of primary school A(observe1), a sixth-class teacher from primary school A(observe3), the co-ordinator of transition programmes for the schools involved(observe2) & the principal of secondary school A(observe4). Data obtained was discussed with various professionals familiar with the transition process at various stages during the research.

(3) Internal Validity: Logic models were used in the training of participants and also for the data coding processes. Explanations were built for scenarios that occurred during the research process. Any unexpected results that occurred were explored in detail.

### **5.7.2 Reliability**

A case study protocol was followed to ensure reliability of the study(see 5.2).

## **5.8 Pilot Testing**

For pilot testing the questions, the same pilot test group were used as identified in the design pilot test in the previous chapter. Through the pilot test it was found that the pre and post questionnaires were effective. The questionnaires had already been examined by the ethics committee in Trinity College and questions thought to be overly leading or improper at this stage were conveyed to the researcher and changed as required. The main change was that questions were seen to be sided negatively and more positive questions were included in the questionnaires, or negatively posed questions were given a more positive slant in some cases where possible.

The questions for the focus groups were much more loosely structured and minor changes were made to these following the pilot study.

## **5.9 Ethics**

For this research there were many ethical concerns due to the fact that the participants were under eighteen years of age.

Ethical considerations with regards to the artefact were very important because the artefact was web-based. The final artefact was a closed website, and once designed and created had to be categorised by the NCTE, and was deemed suitable for usage in primary school A & secondary school A. All participants were registered to use the forum by the researcher. This meant that students did not have to register themselves and no personal information pertaining to the participants was required. Although students were given usernames which ensured their anonymity to other participants of this study, the researcher was aware of the names of the students represented by each username.

It was important that all participants of the study opted into the study and were aware that they could opt out at any time without penalty. Parents, participants and the Board of Management of each participant school signed consent forms which explained what the study encompassed and how the information provided by participants would be used (Appendices 6,7,8 &9). When students were given usernames and passwords to access the artefact, phone calls were made to all parents/guardians involved informing them that their child had access to the artefact and at this point the details of the study were again described to the parents/guardians.

To ensure that no bullying of any kind or inappropriate usage of the artefact resulted, all postings to the website were posted via the researcher for approval. Students were given instructions that they were not to divulge any personal details on the website that would enable them to be identified, they were also instructed not to use names of friends or members of school staff.

As the researcher is working in the participant schools it was essential that any possible conflict of interest was considered. A process of reflexive practice was undertaken by the researcher at each stage of the study and measures were taken to ensure validity and reliability of the research(see 5.7).

It was not the goal of the researcher to ensure that the technological intervention was successful, but rather to test if the technological intervention could be successful.

## **6 Findings & Discussion**

In this chapter the findings of the research study are reported and discussed relative to the sub questions designed to answer the research question.

### **6.1 Did the Participants use the Technology?**

This question is answered in two parts. Firstly sixth-class access to and usage of the internet obtained through the pre-questionnaire is explored with relation to recent national findings, and secondly the sixth-class usage of the artefact is presented and discussed.

#### **6.1.1 Internet Access and Usage**

In the pre-questionnaire sixth-class participants were asked about their internet access and usage. The findings compared favourably with data collected by O Brian et al.,(2009) in an NCTE study of Irish youth and their internet usage(see 2.2.1).

The pre-questionnaire showed that 17/18 sixth-class(94%) had a home computer and 100% of these had internet access at home. The student without internet access at home did have access in her sister's house. Among the sixth-class 7/18(39%) reported that they used the internet for games, 12/18(67%) reported that they used the internet for Bebo, 7/18(39%) reported that they used Facebook. 13/18(72%) sixth-class said they watched YouTube.

In contrast to the findings of the NCTE study 11/18(61%) sixth-class said they used the internet on a daily basis with the other 7(39%) saying that they use it more than once a week.

#### **6.1.2 Sixth-Class Participant Usage of the Artefact**

In total sixth-class participants logged into the website 234 times, averaging 10.6 logins per day, and posted 285 times, averaging 12.95 posts per day. (See Appendix 10 for usage figures)

In evaluating the usage figures there were some important considerations in relation to the sixth-class participants. The sixth-class were regular internet users who frequently used social networking sites. In the absence of this intervention, sixth-class would have only two transition days in secondary school A; the first day is a compulsory day in June when all incoming first-year students are taken from their

primary school to secondary school A and the attendance on that day is traditionally ~100%, the second day is an optional day in August a week before secondary school starts back and attendance is traditionally between 30-40%. This study of transition through communications technology was a very new concept to the participants and there was a large novelty factor.

(a) When did participants use the artefact?

181 of the 234 sixth-class logins were from outside of school.

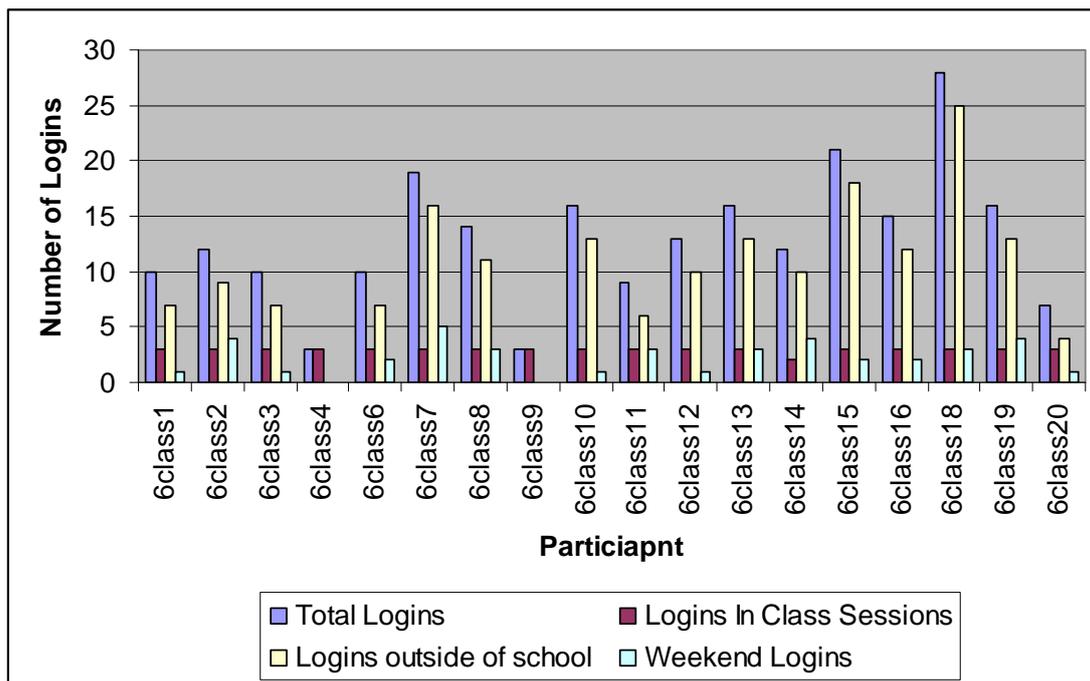


Figure 9: Graph: Sixth-class participant login data

Two sixth-class did not log in to the site outside of school. 6class9 reported that “her computer was being fixed”. 6class4 reported that she had just “not gotten round to it”. The average login per person outside of school time was 10 times per week, 11.3 times per week if you eliminate the two sixth-class who did not login outside of school.

This amount of logins outside of school time suggests that participants were willing to view a discussion about their new secondary school online whereas attendance on the optional transition day is traditionally low. Students logged into the artefact only 40 times on the weekend, amounting to 22% of the total logins outside of school. Burr(2004) suggested that making technology available did not ensure its

usage, the normal life of the students would come first, and sixth-class may not have thought about school on the weekends.

*“In school you’re focused on these kinds of questions....on the weekend with all the fun and relaxation it kinda drifts out of your mind” 6class16*

After-school Monday to Friday amounted to 60% of the total sixth-class usage of the artefact.

*“I used the site when I was doing my homework a few times at home...(and liked) the way you find out stuff before you go into the school” 6class18*

It is possible that sixth-class used the artefact because it was online and as O Brian et al.,(2009) reports, online is a big part of youth culture. Sixth-class noted that they were in fact regularly online and the website offered them another space to visit.

*“The internet is a better way to use it because more people go on to it a day. If they are already on the internet they can go onto it(the site) and check the questions once a day maybe and answer a few at a time” 6class1*

The anonymity could also have played a part, as Shepard(2005) reported that students online with anonymity can express themselves more, and sixth-class were very appreciative of the fact that they had anonymity.

*“You know the way it was anonymous, say if there were others in your class and they knew what you were putting up they might tell other people” 6class1*

Traditional transition days involve large groupings of new peers and it can be difficult for individuals to express themselves.

*“You definitely knew that your question would be answered and there would be no ‘I’m just going to take one more question’ and that would be it.” 6class16*

It is important to understand what participants did when they logged in.

(b) When did students post?

In total sixth-class and first-year participants posted 493 times. Sixth class posted 285 times to the forum over the three week period, an average of 15.8 posts per person(see figure 10). The average amount of posts outside of school time was 2.8. This is an interesting result because it shows that the students mainly used the class sessions to post. If you remove 6class18 from the data set, as he posted well above average, the figures become 13.9 posts on average, and 1.4 posts on average outside of school time. So, excluding data from 6class18, why did sixth-class post

only 10% of their total posts outside of school, yet 76% of their total logins were outside of school? It is possible that sixth-class spent more time on task in the class

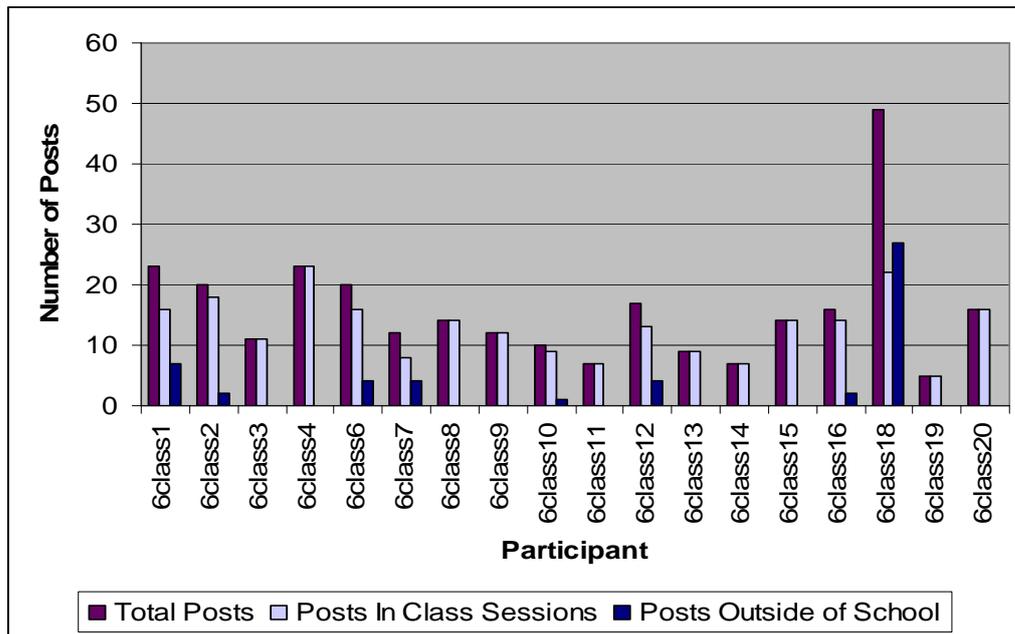


Figure 10: Graph: Sixth class posting in-school and out-of-school

sessions. It is also possible that sixth-class spent the time outside of school mainly reading posts, Vygotsky(1978) identified two stages in constructivist learning, the discussion phase and the reflective phase. The reflective stage being where students could view answers to questions and reflect on them. Login data for sixth-class showed that they did indeed spend their time outside of school reading posts.

Figure 11 below shows a breakdown of the sixth-class logins over the 3 weeks.

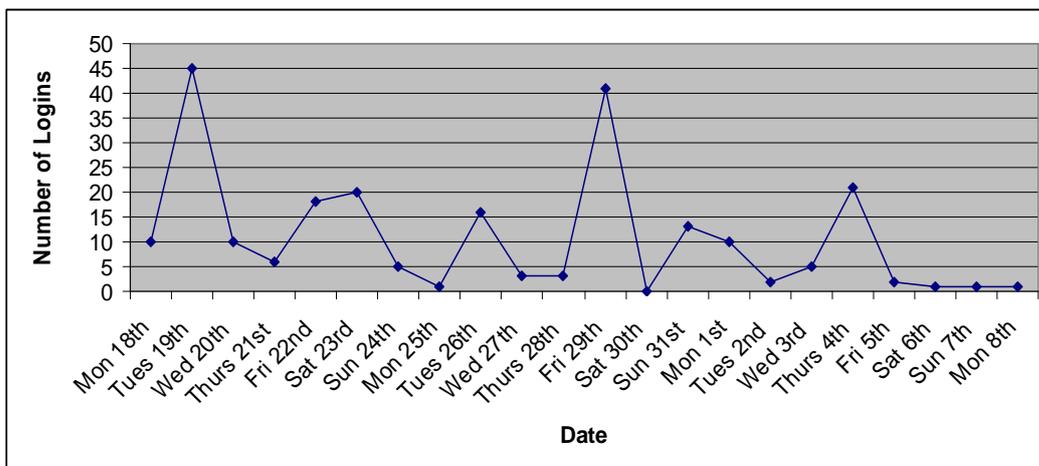


Figure 11: Graph: Number of sixth class logins per day over the course of the research

Sixth-class participants had three in school classes. Logins hit their peak on two of these days. This indicates that sixth-class logged on after in-class sessions possibly to see if their questions had been answered and not necessarily to ask more questions.

Sixth-class asked regularly about the classes, suggesting that they did see the class as the main place to ask questions and a big part of the process.

*“Do we have another class this week” 6class18 (week 1)*

*“Are we going to be allowed to ask more questions” 6class10 (week 2)*

The fact that there were only 8 logins after the final class gives further foundation to this.

(c) Participant Viewing

The number of posts from outside of school and the number of logins outside of school do not correlate. Most sixth-class’ posts(82%) came from in-class sessions and most sixth-class’ logins(77%) came from outside of school. Sixth-class were aware that after their in-class sessions first years would be online. When this occurrence was explored with the sixth-class it did indeed prove to be that they were mainly viewing posts outside of school.

*“(At Home) I just looked at the questions that were already there that other people had already answered” 6class10*

Unfortunately the database did not capture fully the extent to which sixth-class read other participants posts. Figure 12 gives an idea of how many posts were read (out of 105) by sixth-class over the second week.

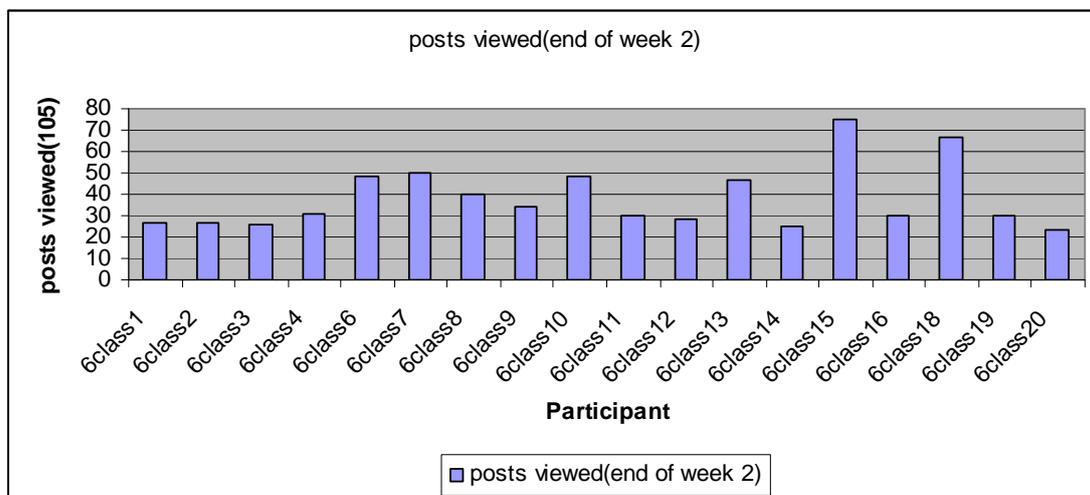


Figure 12: Graph: Sixth class post exclusive post views as recorded by MySQL database

This data is not complete because posts read in week 1 by the students are not recorded in totality(see 5.5.5). Even though this was the case, students read a minimum of 22% of the total posts in week 2.

(d) Did discussions occur?

<b>Thread Depth</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>No. of Topics</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

**Figure 13: Table: Thread depths of forum posts**

The average thread depth of posts was 4.7. Sixth-class saw first-years as experts on the subject of transition and so accepted their responses for the most part as final answers. Sixth-class did follow questions up with other questions within the same thread, and discussion mainly took the form of a questions and answers session. This is consistent with the findings of Cheung & Hew(2005) & Guzdial(1997) where students were happy to ask questions and have them answered.

In a study on young people’s usage of Bebo, Willett(2009) found that young people used the social network in a very ‘banal’ way, logging on to see who was logged on or to make little comments and read others comments. In this study the 202 questions produced by the sixth-class would suggest that they took part in the process in a much more engaging way. In fact 42 posts resulted in a thread depth of 5 or more. In a number of these threads there would be some comments from sixth-class that would not be a question and they would be viewed as conversational(see 6.2.4).

*“not me I just cant stay out of trouble” 6class16*

*“Well I’m sure if you have a secure enough lock it wont” 6class13*

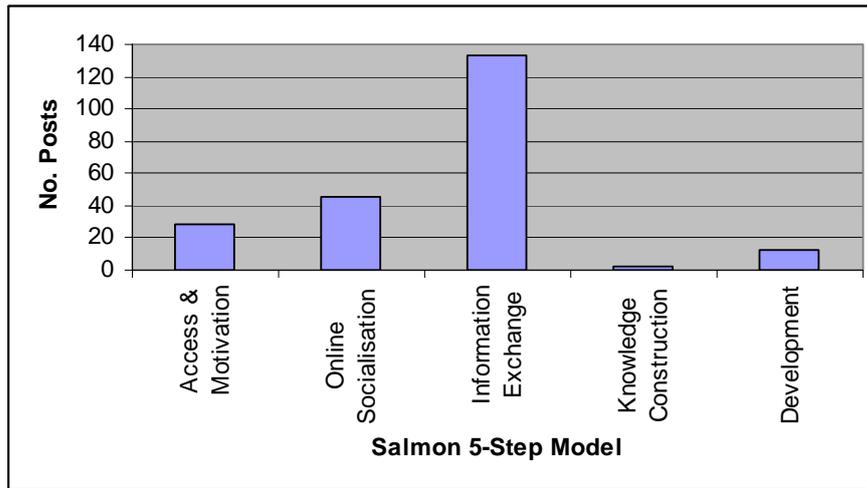
Notably the largest thread depth(23) was a result of a question put forward by a first-year and the third largest thread depth(15) was in response to a question put forward by a first-year also. The other 3 threads that reached a depth above 10 were in relation to subjects, corridor safety and detention. The subject of first-years asking more questions is a subject that would definitely require further study.

First-year responses were not evenly spread across the Salmon model(see Figure 14), although the model did work as a good reference guide for the first-years, the amount of posts being posted for them to answer and the nature of the posts led to the

majority of the responses falling into the ‘information exchange’ category. This is not surprising considering the relationship between the first-years and sixth-class became a very expert/novice relationship. An outcome Galton et al.,(2003) indirectly referred to when he noted that “being a year older matters”.

*“First years would be a bit more knowledgeable about what happens in the school and what its like” 6class18*

*“Little sixth classes coming into first year...I was one of those before” 1year6*



**Figure 14: Graph: Number of first-year responses relative to the Salmon 5-step Model**

## **6.2 What Concerns/Hopes did the Participants Disclose?**

Firstly the findings from the pre-questionnaire are discussed and this is followed by an analysis of the forum posts. The coding of the forum posts are presented and then the codes and the emergent themes are discussed in greater detail with reference to existing literature and in relation to other data collection methods.

### **6.2.1 Findings from Pre-Questionnaire**

The pre-questionnaire results were consistent with the findings of existing literature on transition to secondary school e.g. Anderson et al,(2000) & Evangelou et al,(2008). Consistent with research by Ganesson(2009) & Naughton(1998) results demonstrated that sixth-class were both anxious and excited. The way in which the questions were phrased could have had an impact on the participant response. ‘Are you looking forward to trying new subjects?’ could be met with a ‘yes’, and at the same time ‘are you nervous about the new subjects you will be learning?’ could also receive a ‘yes’.

### **Excitement:**

17/18 sixth-class said that they would like to know more about secondary school A, the one exception noting that he had “*not really thought about it*”.

13 sixth-class were ‘very much’ looking forward to secondary school, and 3 ‘a little’.

14 sixth-class were ‘definitely’ looking forward to making new friends with 4 ‘a little bit’. 13 sixth-class were ‘really excited’ about joining new clubs, with 3 a ‘little excited’.

In relation to trying new subjects 9 sixth-class reported to be ‘really excited’ and 6 sixth-class were ‘a little excited’.

### **Anxiety:**

Sixth-class showed anxiety similar to the anxieties emergent in other studies such as Sebba(2000) & Smyth(2009), in the areas of bullying, curriculum and school size.

11 sixth-class reported that the schoolwork in secondary school would be ‘very different’, with 5 reporting that it would be ‘a little different’. 1 sixth-class reported that she believed that the schoolwork would be ‘the same but harder’.

7 sixth-class said that bullying was a ‘big concern’, with 5 saying that it was a ‘little concern’. This is not surprising considering bullying is one of students’ main concerns pre-transition. Interestingly 3 sixth-class were ‘not really concerned’ and 2 were ‘not concerned at all’. Of these five students, 4 were boys, and bullying according to Pellegrini & Bartini(2001) is much more common among boys as they try to establish themselves in new surroundings.

On the issue of finding their way around the school 11 sixth-class reported that it would be ‘a little difficult’ with 1 sixth-class saying it would be ‘very difficult’.

## **6.2.2 Analysis of the Emergent Themes from Questions Posted**

The 7 main themes that emerged from the coding of 202 questions posted by sixth-class were ‘New Curriculum’, ‘Relationships’, ‘Physical School’, ‘Rules’, ‘Extra-Curricular’, ‘First Day’ and ‘Local’. Each of these themes are discussed below(see Appendix 12 for initial codes).

**(a) New Curriculum**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Sample Post</b>
School Subjects(22)	<i>Are the subjects a lot harder?(6class11)</i>
Subject Options(6)	<i>What subjects do you get to pick?(6class6)</i>
Homework(9)	<i>Do you get much homework over there, and is it hard?(6class3)</i>
Entrance Exams(14)	<i>On your entrance tests do you be nervous?(6class3)</i>
Timetable(21)	<i>Do you go out to yard at small lunch?(6class10)</i>
Fourth Year(6)	<i>Is there an option to do fourth year or is there no fourth year(6class7)</i>
School Change(5)	<i>Is it fun in secondary school or is it boring, like, is it more fun than primary school(6class1)</i>

**Figure 15a: Table: Codes under the theme New Curriculum. Numbers in brackets represent total number of questions categorised under the code.**

The ‘New Curriculum’ was the most dominant theme to emerge from the forum questions posted by sixth-class. In all, 72 questions were posted on this theme. Galton et al, (1999) and Smyth(1999) argue that curriculum continuity should be the main focus of transition programmes, and from the forum posts there is no doubt that participants were concerned about the new curriculum.

Codes under this theme were predominantly codes relating to student concern, the ‘Subject Options’ of which there were 6 questions posted offered the only real indication of sixth-class being excited about new subjects. This is consistent with the finding of the pre-questionnaire. Postings under this theme were mainly a mix of inquiry and concern.

Sixth-class were concerned about the difficulty of new subjects, increased homework and weekend homework. Questions were asked in relation to what the new school timetable would be and sixth-class asked questions requiring the first-year students to compare the primary and secondary experience.

*“Is it fun in secondary school or is it boring, like, is it more fun than primary school” 6class1*

An unexpected question about the existence of fourth-year arose. This indicated that sixth-class were possibly thinking of their new school over a long period of time and this would be an interesting issue to explore. It transpired that

sixth-class were not simply looking at their new school one year at a time but rather as a whole new complete experience.

*“I’m worried about all the homework, tests and exams, junior cert and leaving cert” 6class20*

Interestingly the subject of ‘entrance exams’ came up on 14 occasions. This could have been a result of the timing of the research, as the entrance exams for students to undertake prior to entering secondary school A coincided with the final day of participant usage of the artefact. The topic of entrance exams is not common in research on transition. This in itself added an interesting result and the principal of secondary school A(observe4) noted that *“entrance tests seem to be a source of nervousness for the sixth class.”* The timing of the research was a common topic among participants when asked about their experiences of the artefact;

*“We would probably use it more in the summer before we actually go into the school” 6class1*

#### **(b) Relationships**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Sample Post</b>
Peer Conflict(17)	<i>Are there really mean bullies who beat you up(6class12)</i>
Teachers(11)	<i>Are the teachers cool, or mean(6class10)</i>
Messing(6)	<i>During lunch is there any food fights or bad messing (6class15)</i>
Girlfriends(4)	<i>Does any of your friends have girlfriends or do you?(6class20)</i>
Class Size(1)	<i>Are there a lot of people in one class or are there an ok amount?(6class15)</i>
Friends(5)	<i>Do you make lots of friends when you go in, how(6class14)</i>

**Figure 15b: Table: Codes under the theme Relationships. Numbers in brackets represent total number of questions categorised under the code.**

Pratt & George (2005) stressed that peer relationships were more important than curriculum continuity for students’ continued success into secondary school. In all there were 44 posts in relation to relationships.

On the subject of peers, sixth-class were concerned about peer interaction *“Are the hallways safe or can I expect harassing and messing” 6class15*

When it came to teachers, sixth-class mainly wanted to know whether the teachers would be ‘nice’ or ‘mean’ and explore what scenarios might dictate teacher

responses

*“What are the teachers like are they mean or nice” 6class9*

*“Will teachers give out if you miss some of class” 6class2*

Sixth-class did not post much in relation to friends, ‘observe3’ made reference to this;

*“I would have believed that pupils would be very worried about a shift in peer relationships in second level, but this did not figure prominently”*

This could have been because sixth-class did not want to discuss the issue of friends, aware that their friends were also using the forum, or, the fact that 1year1 asked

*‘Are you nervous about going to secondary school...leaving some of your friends’*

could have negated the need for sixth-class participants to ask the question. The question by 1year1 did result in one of the longest thread depths on the forum with 22 replies.

### (c) Physical School

Code	Sample Post
School Space(17)	<i>Where is the yard, I have never seen it before(6class8)</i>
Storage(15)	<i>If you go to school on a bike do you have somewhere to put it?(6class6)</i>
Equipment(1)	<i>What is the equipment like in secondary school?(6class15)</i>

**Figure 15c: Table: Codes under the theme Physical School. Numbers in brackets represent total number of questions categorised under the code.**

In many studies, Zeedyk(2003) & Hawk & Hill(2004), issues such as getting lost arose as a concern. This was also the case in the pre-questionnaire. Sixth-class posted 33 questions in relation to the physical school. Sixth-class identified finding their way around their new school as possibly one of the main concerns associated with their transition.

*“I’m real nervous about going to secondary school in case I got bullied or didn’t find my way around the school” 6class10*

As well as being concerned about finding their way around the new school

sixth-class asked many questions in relation to storage facilities, ‘observe4’ noted this to be an annually recurring question.

*“Issues in relation to lockers and safety of personal belongings come up year upon year” observe4*

**(d) Rules**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Sample Post</b>
Personal Items(6)	<i>Is it true your allowed to bring in phones and stuff?(6class6)</i>
Discipline(14)	<i>Will people hit you and get suspended or do they get a warning?(6class2)</i>
Passes(2)	<i>Do you have to get a pass to be excused from class?(6class18)</i>

**Figure 15d: Table: Codes under the theme Rules. Numbers in brackets represent total number of questions categorised under the code.**

The topic of school rules received 22 question posts. Interestingly boys, consistent with research e.g. Pellegrini & Bartini(2001), showed bravado in relation to the school rules.

*“(Are there fights during school) I don’t know but I hope there is” 6class20*

Girls on the other hand were very conscientious and seemed very concerned about what would get them into trouble with teachers.

*“Do you have to have all your books on the first day, if you don’t do you get into trouble?” 6class6*

*“If you are in detention will it be put on your report?” 6class8*

The issue of personal items arose also and sixth-class got the opportunity to ask about school uniforms, jewellery and make-up in relation to the rules.

*“If you don’t wear the school uniform do you get detention, and are you allowed to wear make-up?” 6class6*

**(e) First Day**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Sample Post</b>
First Day(10)	<i>Will people be mean or harass you on the first day?(6class10)</i>

**Figure 15e: Table: The Theme First Day. Number in brackets represents total number of questions categorised under the code First Day.**

The first day in secondary school was a subject that received 10 questions and sixth-class questions on this theme crossed over all the other themes. Sixth-class were concerned about practicalities such as what books to bring on the first day, and who would be there. Would they come in before the older students started back at school? & would they get hassle from other students? This day is important because to sixth-class this day will be their introduction to life in secondary school.

*“On our first day will we be made fun of or harassed?” 6class5*

*“Do you make friends on the first day? Is it hard to make friends in secondary school?” 6class6*

#### **(f) Extra-Curricular**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Sample Post</b>
<b>Trips(5)</b>	<i>Do you go on school trips and if you do are they fun?(6class9)</i>
<b>Events(13)</b>	<i>Is there a variety show on every year?(6class2)</i>
<b>After-Schools(9)</b>	<i>What sort of clubs are there and are they good(6class4)</i>

**Figure 15f: Table: Codes under the theme Extra-Curricular. Numbers in brackets represent total number of questions categorised under the code.**

27 questions were posted in relation to extra-curricular activities within the secondary school. The questions were mainly of a positive nature and sixth-class were very much looking forward to the activities that would be available to them. Sixth-class used the forum to question first-year participants as to the range of extra-curricular activities available in the secondary school.

*“In secondary school what kind of clubs do you do?” 6class19*

Sixth-class had visited the secondary school 6 weeks prior to the research project to watch a variety show being performed by secondary school students, this resulted in many questions on the show appearing in the forum.

*“Do you put a variety show on every year?” 6class6*

The comments and questions on extra-curricular activity led observe4 to comment that;

*“the sports and clubs are very important to incoming students and will be increased upon in the coming year”*

**(g) Local**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Sample Post</b>
Cost(4)	<i>How much are the books?(6class8)</i>
Drugs(1)	<i>Is there like drugs in any schools?(6class4)</i>

**Figure 15g: Table: Codes under the theme Local. Numbers in brackets represent total number of questions categorised under the code.**

Two of the codes that emerged from the forum data were ‘Drugs’ and ‘Cost’. The two codes are possibly linked directly to the fact that the secondary school and primary school in question are DEIS1 schools. On the issue of cost, sixth-class asked questions in relation to the cost of books, uniforms and lockers. 11-12 year olds asking about cost would possibly not appear in more affluent school communities.

*“Is the uniform real dear?” 6class4*

The issue of drugs could also be seen as a phenomenon more freely spoken about in less affluent communities.

### **6.2.3 Further Discussion**

The main bulk of the concerns/hopes disclosed by the sixth-class were consistent with existing literature, they were also familiar to the first-year participants and the professional staff who observed the forum. There were some unfamiliar topics. The posts on ‘girlfriends’ and ‘kissing’ were new to staff and first years.

*“(concerns) would be known to the teachers except of course the question on girlfriends” observe3*

*“Some of them(the posts) were really crazy like boyfriends/girlfriends” 1year5*

It could be judged that these posts were slightly off-topic, or that sixth-class students in modern times think about relationships at an earlier stage, or this could be a unique occurrence or a result of participant anonymity. Another possible reason for these postings could be consistent with Patterson et al.,(2000) that students preferred peer-mentors and disclosed more to their peers.

When asked about the opening page, with 1 exception, the sixth-class said that it made them think about the secondary school. Of those that said this only 1 said that it also encouraged them to ask a question as a direct result of the pictures on the opening page. This would correlate well with data from the forum posts because the

pictures on the opening page were mainly of classrooms yet only 3 questions were asked about the classrooms, and with the possible exception of girlfriends/kissing, all other questions were directly related to the transition. These findings did not agree with those of Albright(2002), however, in Albright’s research students were encouraged to discuss a given picture. Further exploration would be required to see how much the opening page kept students on topic, if at all.

#### 6.2.4 Analysis of Non-Question Posts

Sixth-class posted 83 responses that were not in the form of a question. The largest category of these responses(22 responses) were simply comments on other participants’ questions conveying what they would think or hope that the answer from the first-years would be(see Figure 16).

Code	Sample Sixth Class Response
Grateful (4)	<i>Ok Thanks(6class6)</i>
Positive Outlook (8)	<i>Technical graphics and IT? HERE I COME(6class12)</i>
Sibling/Friend Information (3)	<i>But my brother said that 3 girls got locked in(6class7)</i>
Negative outlook (7)	<i>What homework Friday oh man(6class18)</i>
Friends (3)	<i>Have to leave some of my friends from primary school bit sad(6class18)</i>
Assertive Response (14)	<i>The entrance exams are just to let you know how good you are at English and maths etc.(6class12)</i>
Sense of Achievement (5)	<i>I’m not nervous that much at first I was but after reading that I’m fine(6class1)</i>
Helpful (12)	<i>I think you bake on Wednesdays(6class16)</i>
Comment response (22)	<i>I hope not(6class12)</i>
No Solution (5)	<i>Haven’t a clue(6class18)</i>

**Figure 16: Table: Coding for sixth-class non-question forum posts. (see Appendix 11)**

On the other hand 14 responses from the sixth-class to questions asked were very assertive, where sixth-class participants firmly stated an answer to questions by their peers.

*“Beside the astro there is a bike shed so you can lock your bikes” 6class12*

On 12 occasions sixth-class provided helpful solutions to their peers' questions where they were not as certain of the correct response. This showed a great willingness on the part of the sixth-class to try and engage with their peers and be of assistance.

*"I think you probably get awards for basketball of footie or maybe the variety" 6class13*

Sixth-class showed a certain amount of gratitude to first-years for answering their questions.

*"What stood out is probably the eagerness of the first years....wanting to help us to not be nervous or frightened of secondary school" 6class16*

Sixth-class demonstrated a positive outlook toward secondary school in response to some of the first-year replies on 8 occasions, mainly under the themes of 'Extra-Curricular' activities and 'Subject Options'. On 7 occasions sixth-class responses were negative in their outlook to information provided by first-years, these responses came under the themes of 'Rules' and 'New Curriculum'. On 5 occasions sixth-class reported a sense of achievement in response to posts(see 6.3.2).

### **6.3 Did the Participants Benefit from undergoing the Research Process?**

In this section the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire will be compared, responses to the questions on the forum will then be discussed followed by an analysis of the relevant material from focus groups, forum posts, observer views, usage data and other relevant sources.

#### **6.3.1 Pre-Questionnaire v Post-Questionnaire**

The post-questionnaire provided some interesting feedback, but for the most part when data was compared with views expressed by sixth-class, the findings of the questionnaire did not reflect the experience spoken of by the participants. The possible reasons for this are discussed at the end of section 6.3.2.

All 18 sixth-class participants reported that they enjoyed using the artefact and that they found the artefact helpful.

There were very few major changes in the sixth-class responses across most of the questionnaire. A table containing both sets of results is contained in Appendix 4.

3 sixth-class who were concerned about bullying were no longer concerned, only one of these students was male, another sixth-class participant who was 'unsure' became unconcerned. 2 sixth-class who were not concerned noted bullying was a 'big concern' in the post-questionnaire, both these students were boys.

3 sixth-class who were unsure if the school would be difficult to find their way around stated that it would not be difficult, a further 2 sixth-class who originally thought it would be difficult had changed their views and stated that it would not be difficult. 2 sixth-class did however change from believing that it would not be difficult to find their way around to that it would be a 'little difficult'.

On the issue of trying new subjects 1 sixth-class participant who was originally excited reported that they were no longer excited and 1 sixth-class participant who was originally not excited stated that they were now excited about trying new subjects.

Overall there are some positives that can be taken from the results of the post-questionnaire and some negatives. The results would suggest that participation in the research had the effect of giving some participants a more positive outlook, whereas it may have brought about some concerns with others. It is interesting that the participants who did not login outside of school(6class9 & 6class4) answered 'a little bit' to 7/8 questions, avoiding the extreme ends of the Likert scale.

### **6.3.2 Further Analysis of Participant Data**

Forum posts and exploration of participants' experience of the artefact provided very strong evidence that sixth-class participants benefited from the experience.

Sixth-class noted through posts that they had benefited from first-year feedback(see 6.2.4).

*"By the look and sound of it I'm gonna like secondary school" (6class2)*

However, as previously mentioned sixth-class spent a lot of their time outside of class viewing and reading posts more so than writing posts. For this reason a lot of what sixth-class had taken from the artefact was not necessarily reported back through the artefact itself.

Through the focus groups sixth-class provided very strong evidence that they had enjoyed and benefited from the artefact, referring to the forum as 'good craic',

‘very fun to go on’, ‘great to be able to ask other people about secondary school’, ‘very helpful’, and ‘just something different to other websites’. This is consistent with the findings of the post-questionnaire.

A very prominent theme arising from participant feedback on the forum was ‘bullying’. Sixth-class mentioned bullying very frequently in the focus groups, in all 25 times, much more than any other topic, and the comments were always positive.

*“It (using the forum) lets you know a little bit more and calms you down a bit about going in and beatings and all that” 6class14*

Sixth-class did regularly cite examples of where they had gained information, had learning experiences in other aspects of the transition. Sixth-class realised that they were not alone in undergoing the transition process. They also gained information regarding the curriculum, school rules and new relationships.

*“(I learned) that you need tutors and all, make new friends, and everything because secondary school is real different to primary...I know a bit more now about secondary and I know what I am going to be looking forward to” 6class20*

Overall the sixth-class expressed that, through the forum, they had found some alleviation of concerns that they had prior to participation.

*“I was real nervous about going into the school incase I got bullied or didn’t find my way around and they answered my questions and said yeah it’s a breeze, its ok” 6class10*

As already noted the focus groups gave a very positive reflection of the artefact, this could be due to the presence of the researcher conducting the focus groups but with the level of positivity it is unlikely that this is the case. The post-questionnaire did not however demonstrate the same level of gain on the part of the sixth-class. This could be due to the fact that although sixth-class gained information and knowledge about the school, their concerns were still existent. The short time frame of the research could have helped participants feel a temporary sense of relief. Overall through interaction with their peers, sixth-class benefited from factual information about secondary school and from first-year participants’ personal views based upon their experience of their transition.

## 6.4 Limitations of the Research

The time available for the study was reduced by the time taken to receive ethical approval for the study. The unexpected snow over the Christmas period added another barrier to the research, as students returned to school a week late. The tight scheduling of primary school and secondary school classes made it difficult in the early stages to get the participants trained up on using the artefact.

Due to tight restrictions on technology accessible to primary school students, through NCTE controls, many established technologies could not be availed of for use in this research.

The sample size of participants used for this study was quite small. This was partly due to practicalities involved in training and accessing participants but also in part due to a cautious approach taken by the researcher.

## 6.5 Summary of Findings

Below the findings from this chapter are summarised relative to the research questions.

Did the participants use the technology?

- Participants used the site quite frequently over the allowed 3 week period, sixth-class students logged in to the site 234 times, 181 of these logins were outside of school time.
- Sixth-class participants posted 285(202 questions/ 83 responses) times.
- In contrast to sixth-class participants logging into the site 181 times outside of school, they only posted 51 times from outside of school and 234 times from within school. Sixth-class participants mainly read posts when logged in outside of school.
- There were only 40 weekend logins, suggesting sixth-class associated the site with school.
- First-years assumed a role of responsibility over the course of their interactions with the sixth-class participants and this resulted in discussions on the forum mainly taking on the form of question and answer sessions.
- The sixth-class participants viewed the in-school sessions as a core element of the project, and this resulted in limited usage of the website after in-school sessions were completed.

What concerns/hopes did the participants disclose?

- The concerns/hopes expressed by sixth-class participants were consistent with existing literature, and the majority, with minor exceptions, were known to first-year participants and professional staff who participated.
- The stand-out concerns of the sixth-class participants were 'Relationships' and 'New Curriculum', once again consistent with existing literature.
- Unexpected concerns did arise. 'Entrance Exams' arose as a concern but this would reflect the timing of the research. 'Drugs' and 'Cost' arose and could reflect the fact that the schools involved were classified as disadvantaged schools. The topics of 'Girlfriends' and 'Kissing' arose and could possibly be a result of the absence of adults or the anonymity that the participants enjoyed.

Did the participants benefit after undergoing the research process?

- The intervention was seen as positive and enjoyable by all participants, but the extent to which the novelty of the artefact played a part in this is unknown.
- Sixth-class participants learned from the peer-mentored forum and also found some alleviation of their concerns.

## **7 Conclusions**

In this chapter the main findings of the research will be discussed briefly and areas for future research will be suggested.

### **7.1 Main Findings**

Participants did engage with the technology over the short period of this research. The participants enjoyed the website and logged on a large number of times outside of school hours. The reasons for this can be mainly attributed to young peoples' use of technology in their everyday lives and the novelty of the artefact, although the extent to which each of the above factors contributed is difficult to assess from this study. The expert/novice relationship that developed between the sixth-class and first-year participants, coupled with the sixth-class perception of the in-school sessions as a core element of the project, added possible limits to any long-term continuation of the project.

The hopes & concerns disclosed by the participants were very much in line with those commonly occurring in research on school transition. In this case, however, participants disclosed these hopes/concerns through the use of a forum with their peers and in the absence of professional staff. Results suggest that the peer-led approach, the technology involved and the timing of the research did result in some new hopes/concerns.

Participants learned from the information they received through the forum & they also felt some relief in relation to the transition to secondary school. As the research was conducted over a short space of time, the extent to which this relief was temporary or more permanent is unknown.

Overall the participants expressed that they had a very positive experience of the intervention.

### **7.2 Suggestions for Further Research**

Below are some suggestions as to where further research can be undertaken in the area of technology and transition.

- A more structured forum could be constructed. This would allow the researcher to pre-design the themes under which student discussions can take place. This should reduce the build up of posting in one area.

- A more substantial website could be built around the forum including games, links and information pages. This could have the effect of attracting students to the site.
- The research could be conducted in schools of different areas of affluence to examine the different outcomes in regards to concerns/hopes and the surrounding discussions.
- An element of synchronous communication could be added to the transition site to see how it is used.
- Research could be done with larger numbers of participants and larger numbers of schools.
- Involvement of school staff and parents in further research using communications technology could provide some interesting insights.
- A similar study could be done focusing on the experiences of the first-year participants.
- A similar study with only sixth-class students from different schools and no first-years would be very interesting. This could eliminate the expert/novice relationship.

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## 9. Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### Design Table

Element from literature	Implications for the Design	Implementation within the Artefact
Young people have access to the internet & use it regularly, social networking being one of the major uses (O Brian, 2009)	Requirement for an internet based communications technology	Provision of an online forum
Young people are influenced in the main by their peers (Vygotsky,1978; Harris,1998)	Requirement for peer guidance to be facilitated within the artefact	Allow access of the artefact to first year and sixth class students
Peer discussion within a scaffolded process is a best practice approach to learning (Tolmie et al., 2005)	Requirement for scaffolding of the forum	The Salmon model for building online communities was used as a scaffold when setting up the forum
Pictures can assist student discussion and give it a focus (Albright, 2002)	Requirement to use pictures to encourage student discussion and keep focus on topic	An introductory page was used as an opening page to the forum with pictures relative to the discussion topic of transition
Anonymity can assist normally introverted students to engage in discussion (Shepherd, 2005)	Requirement for participant anonymity	All participants were given usernames that would not divulge their real identity within the forum

## Appendix 2

### Pre Questionnaire(Part 1)

1. Do you use the internet?

Yes

No

2. Do you have a computer at home?

Yes

No

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you have an internet connection at home?

Yes

No

4. Is it broadband or dial-up?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. How often do you use the internet?

Every day

Once a week

More than once a week

Once every 2 weeks

Once a month

Less than once a month

Never

6. What do you use the internet for?

\_\_\_\_\_

Time \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Time \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Time \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Time \_\_\_\_\_

7. Where do you use the internet mostly?

Home

Relatives Home

Friends Home

School

Library

Other \_\_\_\_\_

## Pre Questionnaire(Part 2)

Would you like to know more about the secondary school you will be attending next year?

Yes

No

(Please Tick one of the boxes above)

For Statements 1-8 Please tick only one box for each statement

### 1. I am looking forward to starting secondary school:

Very much

A little

Unsure

Not really

Not at all

### 2. I am looking forward to making new friends:

Definitely

A little bit

Unsure

It will be difficult

Not looking forward to it

### 3. The schoolwork will be different:

Very Different

A little different

Not sure

Similar

The same but harder

### 4. Bullying is a concern:

A big concern

A little concern

Not sure

Not really concerned

Not concerned at all

### 5. I am looking forward to joining new clubs:

Really Excited

A little

Not sure

Not really

Not at all

### 6. The school will be difficult to find my way around:

Very difficult

A little difficult

Not sure

Not really difficult

Not difficult at all

**7. I am looking forward to trying new subjects:**

- Really excited
- A little excited
- Not sure
- Not really
- Not at all

**8. I am looking forward to having many new teachers:**

- Definitely
- A little bit
- Not sure
- Not really
- Not at all

## Appendix 3

### Post Questionnaire

Did you enjoy the Forum?

- Yes   
No

Who did you use the Forum with?

- By myself   
With friends   
With family   
With a teacher   
Other

(Tick as many boxes as needed)

Did you find the Forum helpful?

- Yes   
No

For Statements 1-8 Please tick only one box for each statement

1. I am looking forward to starting secondary school:

- Very much   
A little   
Unsure   
Not really   
Not at all

2. I am looking forward to making new friends:

- Definitely   
A little bit   
Unsure   
It will be difficult   
Not looking forward to it

3. The schoolwork will be different:

- Very Different   
A little different   
Not sure   
Similar   
The same but harder

4. Bullying is a concern:

- A big concern   
A little concern   
Not sure   
Not really concerned   
Not concerned at all

**5. I am looking forward to joining new clubs:**

- Really Excited
- A little
- Not sure
- Not really
- Not at all

**6. The school will be difficult to find my way around:**

- Very difficult
- A little difficult
- Not sure
- Not really difficult
- Not difficult at all

**7. I am looking forward to trying new subjects:**

- Really excited
- A little excited
- Not sure
- Not really
- Not at all

**8. I am looking forward to having many new teachers:**

- Definitely
- A little bit
- Not sure
- Not really
- Not at all

## Appendix 4

### Comparison between Pre and Post-Questionnaire

		6class	1	2	3	4	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	18	19	20	
Would you like to know more about the secondary school?	Yes		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	No											Y									
I am looking forward to starting secondary school.	Very Much		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	A Little				Y	Y	Y	Y		Y								Y			
	Unsure							Y					Y								
	Not Really																				
	Not at all																				
I am looking forward to making new friends	Definitely		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	A Little Bit				Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y					Y		Y	Y
	Unsure																				
	It will be difficult																				
	Not looking forward to it																				
The schoolwork will be different	Very Different			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	A Little Different		Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Not sure											Y									Y
	Similar																				
	The same but harder																				
Bullying is a concern	A big concern		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y					Y	Y	Y	Y				Y	Y
	A little concern					Y		Y	Y	Y	Y		Y						Y		
	Not sure															Y			Y		
	Not really concerned						Y	Y				Y	Y	Y	Y						
	Not concerned at all						Y	Y								Y	Y	Y			Y
I am looking forward to joining new clubs.	Really excited		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	A little					Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Not sure								Y												
	Not really																Y				
	Not at all																				
The school will be difficult to find my way around.	Very difficult							Y	Y		Y									Y	
	A little difficult		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Not sure							Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Not really difficult		Y	Y		Y		Y				Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Not difficult at all																				



## **Appendix 5**

### **Focus Group Questions**

**Semi-Structured.** The main questions are listed below. The answers were explored further with the areas, in italics, under each question explored if they did not appear in the student answers.

**Did you use the website?**

*When? Why? Where? Time of year?*

**What did you think of the website?**

*Explain? Difficulties? Improvements? Medium?*

**Did you feel comfortable using the website?**

*Anonymity? Concerns/Hopes? Other users?*

**How did you use the website?**

*Read? Post? School exercise?*

**Did you learn from using the website?**

*What? Responses?*

**What did you think of the structure of the website?**

*Opening page? Peers?*

**Any Further Comments?**

## Appendix 6

### Participant Consent Form (6<sup>th</sup> Class)

As a sixth class student who will be transferring to secondary school A next year you have been invited to take part in a transition programme between your primary school and the secondary school. For this programme you will be given access to a chatroom and forum where you will be able to chat with sixth class students from your school and first year students from the secondary school about some of the issues relating to moving school. Whilst taking part in the sessions a research student from Trinity College Dublin will be collecting information for a research project. The researcher is Tom Crean. The forum and chatroom will be contained on a password protected website where only participants of the research and the researcher will have access. The chatroom and forums will be monitored at all times by the researcher. Your parents are invited to monitor the conversations in both the chatroom and forum.

If you agree to take part in the programme the researcher will be keeping a record of the chat from the chatroom while you are using it. A copy of all the information on the forum will also be recorded by the researcher. Before the programme begins you will be asked to complete a questionnaire and after the programme ends you will be asked to complete another questionnaire. You may be asked to take part in a small group interview or a solo interview with the researcher, audio recordings of these interviews will be kept by the researcher. The researcher will have sole access to the audio recordings and they will not be replayed in any public forum. All transcriptions of the recordings will ensure anonymity to the participants. The researcher will also keep a diary of activity over the course of the programme. What you write in the forum and in the chatroom may be used in a report, but it will be written in a way that nobody reading the report will know who put the information into the chatroom or forum.

If you agree to take part in the programme this information collected as detailed above will be used in the research. Any information used in the research will be anonymised, no names will be used and nobody will know which student made any of the comments recorded. Should the researcher discover any illegal activities during the study, the school principal will be notified. The results of this research will be written up as a masters study and the study will be held in Trinity College Dublin.

Participation in the programme is completely voluntary. You can refuse to take part at any time and there will be no penalty for this. If you pull out of the programme none of your information will be used in the research, and any information recorded about your participation will be deleted. If there are questions on the questionnaires or questions in the interview which you do not want to answer, you can refuse to answer them and there will be no penalty for this. In the interviews you will be asked not to mention any names, any names mentioned will be anonymised.

If you agree to take part in this study an introductory talk will be given to you and other students in your school to make sure you understand the process, any questions you have will be answered at this time and any concerns you have will be addressed also. Should you have any questions before this time you may contact me at my office in your school.

I.....agree to take part in this research programme.  
(student signature)

Date.....

I have read and I understand the information given to me about the programme. I also understand that I can pull out of the programme at any time I choose. I know how to contact the researcher should I have any questions or concerns.

Signature of Researcher.....

Date.....

## **Appendix 7**

### **Participant Consent Form (1<sup>st</sup> Year)**

As a first year student you are being invited to take part in a transition programme between your secondary school and Primary school A. For this programme you will be given access to a chatroom and forum where you will be able to chat with sixth class students from Primary school A and first year students from your school about some of the issues relating to moving school. You will be talking with sixth class students about some of the concerns that they have about moving up to your school. Whilst taking part in the sessions a research student from Trinity College Dublin will be collecting information for a research project. The researcher is Tom Crean. The forum and chatroom will be contained on a password protected website where only participants of the research and the researcher will have access. The chatroom and forums will be monitored at all times by the researcher. Your parents are invited to monitor the conversations in both the chatroom and forum.

If you agree to take part in the programme the researcher will be keeping a record of the chat from the chatroom while you are using it. A copy of all the information on the forum will also be recorded by the researcher. You may be asked to take part in a small group interview or a solo interview with the researcher, audio recordings of these interviews will be kept by the researcher. The researcher will have sole access to the audio recordings and they will not be replayed in any public forum. All transcriptions of the recordings will ensure anonymity to the participants. The researcher will also keep a diary of activity over the course of the programme. What you write in the forum and in the chatroom may be used in a report, but it will be written in a way that nobody reading the report will know who put the information into the chatroom or forum.

If you agree to take part in the programme this information collected as detailed above will be used in the research. Any information used in the research will be anonymised, no names will be used and nobody will know which student made any of the comments recorded. Should the researcher discover any illegal activities during the study, the school principal will be notified. The results of this research will be written up as a masters study and the study will be held in Trinity College Dublin.

Participation in the programme is completely voluntary. You can refuse to take part at any time and there will be no penalty for this. If you pull out of the programme none of your information will be used in the research, and any information recorded about your participation will be deleted. If there are questions in the interview which you do not want to answer, you can refuse to answer them and there will be no penalty for this. In the interviews you will be asked not to mention any names, any names mentioned will be anonymised.

If you agree to take part in this study an introductory talk will be given to you and other students in your school to make sure you understand the process, any questions you have will be answered at this time and any concerns you have will be addressed also. Should you have any questions before this time you may contact me at my office in your school.

I.....agree to take part in this research programme.  
(student signature)

Date.....

I have read and I understand the information given to me about the programme. I also understand that I can pull out of the programme at any time I choose. I know how to contact the researcher should I have any questions or concerns.

Signature of Researcher.....  
Date.....

## Appendix 8

### Parent/Guardian Consent Form for Sixth Class Students

#### Dear Parent/Guardian

Your child has been invited to take part in a research project relating to student transition from primary school to secondary school.

As a sixth class student who will be transferring to secondary school A next year your child has been selected to take part in a transition programme between his/her primary school and the secondary school. For this programme he/she will be given access to a chatroom and forum where he/she will be able to chat with sixth class students from his/her school and first year students from the secondary school about some of the issues relating to moving school. Whilst your child is taking part in the sessions a research student from Trinity College Dublin will be collecting information for a research project. The researcher is Tom Crean. The forum and chatroom will be contained on a password protected website where only participants of the research and the researcher will have access. The chatroom and forums will be monitored at all times by the researcher. You are also invited to monitor the conversations online if you would like too.

If you agree to allow your child to take part in the programme the researcher will be keeping a record of the chat from the chatroom while he/she is using it. A copy of all the information on the forum will also be recorded by the researcher. Before the programme begins he/she will be asked to complete a questionnaire and after the programme ends he/she will be asked to complete another questionnaire. He/she may be asked to take part in a small group interview or a solo interview with the researcher, audio recordings of these interviews will be kept by the researcher. The researcher will have sole access to the audio recordings and they will not be replayed in any public forum. All transcriptions of the recordings will ensure anonymity to the participants. The researcher will also keep a diary of activity over the course of the programme. Excerpts from the text only chat data and text only forum data may be used in anonymised form, and only if it cannot be deduced from the example the identity of the composer.

If you agree to allow your child to take part in the programme this information collected as detailed above will be used in the research. Any information used in the research will be anonymised, no names will be used and nobody will know which student made any of the comments recorded. Should the researcher discover any illegal activities during the study, the school principal will be notified. The results of this research will be written up as a masters study and the study will be held in Trinity College Dublin.

Participation in the programme is completely voluntary. Your child can refuse to take part at any time and there will be no penalty for this. If he/she pulls out of the programme none of his/her information will be used in the research, and any information recorded about his/her participation will be deleted. If there are questions on the questionnaires or questions in the interview which your child does not want to answer, he/she can refuse to answer them and there will be no penalty for this. In the interviews he/she will be asked not to mention any names, any names mentioned will be anonymised.

If you agree to allow your child to take part in this study an introductory talk will be given to you and other parents in your child's school, any questions you have will be answered at this time and any concerns you have will be addressed also. Should you have any questions before this time you may contact me by e-mail at [creant@tcd.ie](mailto:creant@tcd.ie) or by telephone on 087 0577345.

The school board of management has agreed to allow me to conduct this research within the school. Your child will also have limited access to the transition forum from home. You may observe your child using the forum if you would like and I would be happy to hear your comments.

I.....agree to take part in this research programme.  
(Parent signature)

Date.....

I have read and I understand the information given to me about the programme. I also understand that my child can pull out of the programme at any time he/she so chooses. I know how to contact the researcher should I have any questions or concerns.

Signature of Researcher.....

Date.....

## Parent/Guardian Consent Form for First Year Students

### Dear Parent/Guardian

Your child has been invited to take part in a research project relating to student transition from primary school to secondary school.

As a first year student of secondary school A your child has been selected to take part in a transition programme between primary school A and the secondary school. For this programme he/she will be given access to a chatroom and forum where he/she will be able to chat with sixth class students from Primary school A and first year students from his/her secondary school about some of the issues relating to moving school. Whilst your child is taking part in the sessions a research student from Trinity College Dublin will be collecting information for a research project. The researcher is Tom Crean. The forum and chatroom will be contained on a password protected website where only participants of the research and the researcher will have access. The chatroom and forums will be monitored at all times by the researcher. You are also invited to monitor the conversations online if you would like too.

If you agree to allow your child to take part in the programme the researcher will be keeping a record of the chat from the chatroom while he/she is using it. A copy of all the information on the forum will also be recorded by the researcher. He/she may be asked to take part in a small group interview or a solo interview with the researcher, audio recordings of these interviews will be kept by the researcher. The researcher will have sole access to the audio recordings and they will not be replayed in any public forum. All transcriptions of the recordings will ensure anonymity to the participants. The researcher will also keep a diary of activity over the course of the programme. The forum and chatroom will be contained on a password protected website where only participants of the research and the researcher will have access. The chatroom and forums will be monitored at all times by the researcher. Excerpts from the text only chat data and text only forum data may be used in anonymised form, and only if it cannot be deduced from the example the identity of the composer.

If you agree to allow your child to take part in the programme this information collected as detailed above will be used in the research. Any information used in the research will be anonymised, no names will be used and nobody will know which student made any of the comments recorded. Should the researcher discover any illegal activities during the study, the school principal will be notified. The results of this research will be written up as a masters study and the study will be held in Trinity College Dublin.

Participation in the programme is completely voluntary. Your child can refuse to take part at any time and there will be no penalty for this. If he/she pulls out of the programme none of his/her information will be used in the research, and any information recorded about his/her participation will be deleted. If there are questions in the interview which your child does not want to answer, he/she can refuse to answer them and there will be no penalty for this. In the interviews he/she will be asked not to mention any names, any names mentioned will be anonymised.

If you agree to allow your child to take part in this study an introductory talk will be given to you and other parents in your child's school, any questions you have will be answered at this time and any concerns you have will be addressed also. Should you have any questions before this time you may contact me by e-mail at [creant@tcd.ie](mailto:creant@tcd.ie) or by telephone on 087 0577345.

The school board of management has agreed to allow me to conduct this research within the school. Your child will also have limited access to the transition forum from home. You may observe your child using the forum if you would like and I would be happy to hear your comments.

I.....agree to take part in this research programme.

(Parent signature)

Date.....

I have read and I understand the information given to me about the programme. I also understand that my child can pull out of the programme at any time he/she so chooses. I know how to contact the researcher should I have any questions or concerns.

Signature of Researcher.....

Date.....

## Appendix 9

### Board of Management Consent Form (Primary School)

#### Dear Chairperson

My name is Tom Crean. I am doing a research masters in Trinity College Dublin. The research project is to examine whether chatrooms and forums can be effective technologies in allowing students from sixth class and first year discuss concerns surrounding the transition of students from primary school to secondary school.

For this research I would like to use your school as a research venue and I would like to offer some of your students the opportunity to be participants in this research.

Selected sixth class students from your school will be given access to a chatroom on a website during class time (30 minutes) where they will discuss with each other different concerns they may have in relation to transferring to secondary school A. There will also be first year students from the secondary school in the chatroom to discuss these concerns with your students. Outside of school time (2 nights per week between 5pm and 6pm) your students will be given access to a forum over the internet where they can post questions and answer questions written in the forum by the students participating.

The forum and chatroom will be contained on a password protected website where only participants of the research and the researcher will have access. The chatroom and forums will be monitored at all times by the researcher. In the unlikely event that any information pertaining to illegal activity should emerge during this study I will follow the school's child protection policy and inform the relevant authority.

Over the course of this research I will be recording observations as the students use the technology. All of the information contained in the chatrooms and forums will be recorded. I will also conduct small group interviews and one-one interviews with students which I will audio record. The researcher will have sole access to the audio recordings and they will not be replayed in any public forum. All transcriptions of the recordings will ensure anonymity to the participants. Students will also be asked to complete questionnaires. Excerpts from the text only chat data and text only forum data may be used in anonymised form, and only if it cannot be deduced from the example the identity of the composer. The data collected will be written up as my thesis for Trinity College Dublin and all information will be anonymised before it is written up. All data will be stored by the researcher.

I would like to request your permission to allow me to use your school premises for part of this research. I will send out separate permission letters to parents/guardians and students informing them of the details of the project and requesting their participation. You can withdraw your school from participating in this project at any time and without penalty should you wish to do so, any information collected through the participation of your school will then be destroyed.

If you have any questions or concerns I can be contacted by e-mail at [creant@tcd.ie](mailto:creant@tcd.ie) or by telephone on 087 0577345.

The board has been provided with information outlining the activities the children will take part in, how data will be collected and stored, and how it can contact the researcher.

The board of .....is aware that it may withdraw the school from participating in the ..... project at any time and without penalty.

Signature of Chairperson.....  
Date.....

Signature of Principal.....  
Date.....

Signature of Researcher.....  
Date.....

## Board of Management Consent Form (Secondary School)

**Dear Chairperson**

My name is Tom Crean. I am doing a research masters in Trinity College Dublin. The research project is to examine whether chatrooms and forums can be effective technologies in allowing students from sixth class and first year discuss concerns surrounding the transition of students from primary school to secondary school.

For this research I would like to use your school as a research venue and I would like to offer some of your students the opportunity to be participants in this research.

Selected sixth class students from one of your feeder primary schools, school A will be given access to a chatroom on a website during class time (30 minutes) where they will discuss with each other different concerns they may have in relation to transferring to your secondary school. There will also be first year students from the secondary school selected to participate in the chatroom to discuss these concerns with the sixth class students. Outside of school time (2 nights per week between 5pm and 6pm) your students will be given access to a forum over the internet where they can answer questions written in the forum by the sixth class students in relation to their concerns.

The forum and chatroom will be contained on a password protected website where only participants of the research and the researcher will have access. The chatroom and forums will be monitored at all times by the researcher. In the unlikely event that any information pertaining to illegal activity should emerge during this study I will follow the school's child protection policy and inform the relevant authority.

Over the course of this research I will be recording observations as the students use the technology. All of the information contained in the chatrooms and forums will be recorded. I will also conduct small group interviews and one-one interviews with students which I will audio record. The researcher will have sole access to the audio recordings and they will not be replayed in any public forum. All transcriptions of the recordings will ensure anonymity to the participants. Students will also be asked to complete questionnaires. Excerpts from the text only chat data and text only forum data may be used in anonymised form, and only if it cannot be deduced from the example the identity of the composer. The data collected will be written up as my thesis for Trinity College Dublin and all information will be anonymised before it is written up. All data will be stored by the researcher.

I would like to request your permission to allow me to use your school premises for part of this research. I will send out separate permission letters to parents/guardians and students informing them of the details of the project and requesting their participation. You can withdraw your school from participating in this project at any time and without penalty should you wish to do so, any information collected through the participation of your school will then be destroyed.

If you have any questions or concerns I can be contacted by e-mail at [creant@tcd.ie](mailto:creant@tcd.ie) or by telephone on 087 0577345.

The board has been provided with information outlining the activities the children will take part in, how data will be collected and stored, and how it can contact the researcher.

The board of ..... is aware that it may withdraw the school from participating in the ..... project at any time and without penalty.

Signature of Chairperson.....  
Date.....

Signature of Principal.....  
Date.....

Signature of Researcher.....  
Date.....

## Appendix 10

### Sixth-Class Artefact Usage Statistics

Participant	Total Logins	Logins In Class Sessions	Logins outside of school	Weekend Logins	Total Posts	Posts In Class Sessions	Posts Outside of School
6class1	10	3	7	1	23	16	7
6class2	12	3	9	4	20	18	2
6class3	10	3	7	1	11	11	0
6class4	3	3	0	0	23	23	0
6class6	10	3	7	2	20	16	4
6class7	19	3	16	5	12	8	4
6class8	14	3	11	3	14	14	0
6class9	3	3	0	0	12	12	0
6class10	16	3	13	1	10	9	1
6class11	9	3	6	3	7	7	0
6class12	13	3	10	1	17	13	4
6class13	16	3	13	3	9	9	0
6class14	12	2	10	4	7	7	0
6class15	21	3	18	2	14	14	0
6class16	15	3	12	2	16	14	2
6class18	28	3	25	3	49	22	27
6class19	16	3	13	4	5	5	0
6class20	7	3	4	1	16	16	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>51</b>

## Appendix 11

### Sixth-Class Non-Question Responses(Coded)

<b>Code</b>	<b>Sixth Class Response</b>
Grateful (4)	<i>Cool, I hope I can behave well(6class12)</i>
	<i>Ok Thanks(6class6)</i>
Positive Outlook (8)	<i>Technical graphics and IT? HERE I COME(6class12)</i>
	<i>I can not wait to go to secondary(6class3)</i>
	<i>Hope they do that would be animal(6class18)</i>
Sibling/Friend Information (3)	<i>Sounds fun(6class15)</i>
	<i>But my brother said that 3 girls got locked in(6class7)</i>
Negative outlook (7)	<i>Detention I'll get five times a week(6class18)</i>
	<i>What homework Friday oh man(6class18)</i>
Friends (3)	<i>I'd like to know this because I don't want to be lonely(6class15)</i>
	<i>Have to leave some of my friends from primary school bit sad(6class18)</i>
Assertive Response (14)	<i>Some questions you might not know but most of it you would have done in primary school(6class11)</i>
	<i>The entrance exams are just to let you know how good you are at English and maths etc.(6class12)</i>
	<i>Yes of course there is competitions(6class20)</i>
Sense of Achievement (5)	<i>By the look and sound of it I'm gonna like secondary school(6class2)</i>
	<i>Thanks for saying that, at least that's out of my head(6class18)</i>
	<i>I'm not nervous that much at first I was but after reading that I'm fine(6class1)</i>
	<i>I'm not really worried anymore because everybodys saying that theres nothing to be worried about(6class2)</i>
Helpful (12)	<i>I think you bake on Wednesdays(6class16)</i>
	<i>I think ya get them in the school(6class1)</i>
Comment response (22)	<i>I hope not(6class12)</i>
	<i>I wouldn't say so(6class1)</i>
	<i>Hope so(6class18)</i>
No Solution (5)	<i>I don't know(6class16)</i>
	<i>Haven't a clue(6class18)</i>

## Appendix 12

### Sixth-Class Question Codes & Preliminary Codes

The table below contains example responses for the 7 emergent themes from the coding of sixth-class questions from the forum. The column on the left shows the final codes and the column on the right shows the initial codes prior to code reduction. The themes are colour coordinated. The code key is given below the table.

Final Code	Student Posts	Original Code
Messing (6)	<i>During lunch is there any food fights or bad messing (6class15)</i>	Lunch activity
	<i>Does there be any messing in classrooms(6class18)</i>	Yard Activity
After-schools (9)	<i>What sort of clubs are there and are they good(6class4)</i>	Clubs
	<i>Do you do any football or basketball leagues?(6class20)</i>	Sports Leagues
	<i>Is there clubs in it that are like afterschool clubs?(6class4)</i>	Afterschool Clubs
Friends (5)	<i>Do you make lots of friends when you go in, how(6class14)</i>	New Friends
	<i>I will miss my friends 6class6</i>	Old Friends
School Change (5)	<i>Is it fun in secondary school or is it boring, like, is it more fun than primary school(6class1)</i>	Different School
Storage (15)	<i>If you go to school on a bike do you have somewhere to put it?(6class6)</i>	Bike Shed
Peer Conflict (17)	<i>Are there really mean bullies who beat you up(6class12)</i>	Bullies
	<i>Is there any fights in the school?(6class13)</i>	Fights
School Subjects (22)	<i>Are the subjects a lot harder?(6class11)</i>	Harder Subjects
	<i>What subjects are the best in secondary school?(6class3)</i>	Best Subjects
Teachers (11)	<i>Are the teachers cool, or mean(6class10)</i>	Teachers
School Space (17)	<i>What are the classrooms like?(6class9)</i>	Classrooms
	<i>Where is the yard, I have never seen it before(6class8)</i>	Yard
	<i>Do you get a map of the school?(6class18)</i>	School Map
Subject Options (6)	<i>What subjects do you get to pick?(6class6)</i>	Subject Choices
Discipline (14)	<i>Whats detention like, and how do you get it?(6class12)</i>	Detention
	<i>Will people hit you and get suspended or do they get a warning?(6class2)</i>	School Discipline System
Entrance Exams (14)	<i>Are the entrance exams easy or hard?(6class10)</i>	Exam Difficulty
	<i>On your entrance tests do you be nervous?(6class3)</i>	Nervous at Exams
Homework (9)	<i>Do you get much homework over there, and is it hard?(6class3)</i>	Homework
	<i>Is there really homework on Friday?(6class16)</i>	Weekend Homework

Timetable (21)	<i>Is it true that there is half days on Wednesdays?(6class9)</i>	Half Days
	<i>Do you go out to yard at small lunch?(6class10)</i>	Lunch Routine
Passes (2)	<i>Do you have to get a pass to be excused from class?(6class18)</i>	Hall Passes
First Day (10)	<i>Will people be mean or harass you on the first day?(6class10)</i>	First Day harassment
	<i>Do you get first year beatings in secondary school?(6class20)</i>	First Year Beatings
	<i>Do you have to have all your books on the first day?(6class6)</i>	First Day Books
Events (13)	<i>Do you do sports day in secondary school?(6class20)</i>	Sports Day
	<i>What kind of competitions do you do?(6class18)</i>	Competitions
	<i>Is there a variety show on every year?(6class2)</i>	Variety Show
Personal Items (6)	<i>Is it true your allowed to bring in phones and stuff?(6class6)</i>	Personal Belongings
Trips (5)	<i>Do you go to different countries on trips?(6class20)</i>	International Trips
	<i>Do you go on school trips and if you do are they fun?(6class9)</i>	Fun Trips
Class Size (1)	<i>Are there a lot of people in one class or are there an ok amount?(6class15)</i>	Class Size
Girlfriends (4)	<i>Does any of your friends have girlfriends or do you?(6class20)</i>	Girlfriends
Cost (4)	<i>How much does it cost for a locker(6class7)</i>	Locker Cost
	<i>How much are the books?(6class8)</i>	Book Cost
Fourth Year (6)	<i>Is there an option to do fourth year or is there no fourth year(6class7)</i>	Fourth Year
Drugs (1)	<i>Is there like drugs in any schools?(6class4)</i>	Drugs
Equipment (1)	<i>What is the equipment like in secondary school?(6class15)</i>	School Equipment

### Colour Codes

**New Curriculum**

**Relationships**

**Extra-Curricular**

**Local**

**First Day**

**Physical School**

**Rules**