**School of Education
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Examining the socio-emotional aspects of
primary-secondary school transitions:
Support systems and resilience

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Primary-Secondary School Transitions

Conceptualisation of Transitions: Primary and secondary school teachers' views

1. *The **movement** of pupils from one phase of their education to the next.*

2. *Seamless **move** from primary to secondary with a clear focus on teaching and learning.*

3. *Any **move** between stages or establishment or settings or even classes.*

4. *Any **change** in learning environment or expectation.*

5. *A period of **change** which can affect young people in a variety of ways (i.e., psychologically, socially, physically etc..)*

6. *Transition is physical, social and emotional **adaptation** to new environments and stressors.*

7. *The **move** on from one state to another where **change** can have a major impact on an individual. **Moving** out of ones comfort zone and meeting and overcoming new challenges.*

Jindal-Snape, 2018; Jindal-Snape & Mitchell, under review

Conceptualisation of Primary-Secondary School Transition in research literature

Systematic Literature Review from 2008-2018

96 papers; 86 papers included some insight into researchers' conceptualisation

Not always explicit; inferred on the basis of theory used

Conceptualisation categories

➢ Multiple conceptualisations (so over 86 mentioned)

➢ Transition as change (n=54)

➢ Normative period in school career (n=20)

➢ Multiple transitions (n=11)

➢ Discontinuity, both curricular and relationships (n=6)

➢ Normative life transitions (n=41)

➢ Rite of passage (n=3)

Jindal-Snape, Symonds, Hannah & Barlow (in preparation)

Transition can be defined as

(i) an ongoing process of psychological, social and educational adaptation,

(ii) over time,

(iii) due to changes in context, interpersonal relationships and identity,

(iv) which can be both exciting and worrying, and

(v) requires ongoing support.

Jindal-Snape, 2018

❖ Challenging and stressful

❖ Satisfying and fulfilling
❖ Opportunity to 'move on' and 'move up' with increased choices

Illustrations: Graham Ogilvie

Authors' discourse around primary-secondary transitions: Systematic literature review (2008-2018)

papers reviewed; published between 2008-2018

Positive impact of transitions (n=2)

> ➢ Transition efficacy and impact of perception of teachers' mastery goals; transition as normative school career, developed a transition efficacy scale aligned to stage-environment fit theory (Madjar & Chohat, 2017)

> ➢ Took a strength-based approach, positive experiences of six children with ASD, highlighted that with appropriate support children could have successful transitions and positive experiences (Neal & Frederickson, 2016)

Both negative and positive aspects of transitions (n=25); however 15 highlighted more negatives than positives

Neutral discourse (n=9)

Jindal-Snape, Symonds, Hannah & Barlow (under preparation)

uthors' discourse around primary-secondary transitions (contd.)

Negative discourse (n=60)

- Premise and argument based on previous literature:

➢ Disruptive and challenged children's psychological wellbeing (e.g., Poorthuis, Thomaes, van Aken Japp, Dennisen and de Castro, 2014)

➢ Decline in subject-specific self-efficacy scores (Lofgran, Whiting & Smith, 2015)

➢ Decline in achievement (Mudaly & Sukhdeo, 2015; Serbin Stack & Kingdon, 2013; Vasquez-Salgado & Chavira, 2014)

➢ Led to high dropout rates (McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun & Cochrane, 2008), caused stress and anxiety (Peters & Brooks, 2016),

➢ Especially challenging for children with ASD (Mandy et al., 2016a; Tso & Strnadova, 2017)

iscourse in children and young people's natural environment

reparation by primary school) Didn't really help, just became more

ict and they said "the teachers at secondary are very strict"

upil, Stage 2; Jindal-Snape & Mitchell, 2014-2016)

e [cousin] ...started talking about the lunches and

ot really confused, and was really scared ...showed me her

aths jotter and it looked really hard but when it was actually

e that was at the 'secondary

ool A', it's not really that hard. You do get a little bit frightened

fore you come up but when you're actually here it's better.

hild 5, initial interview in S1; Jindal-Snape & Foggie, p. 13)

Harry Potter

Diary of a wimpy kid
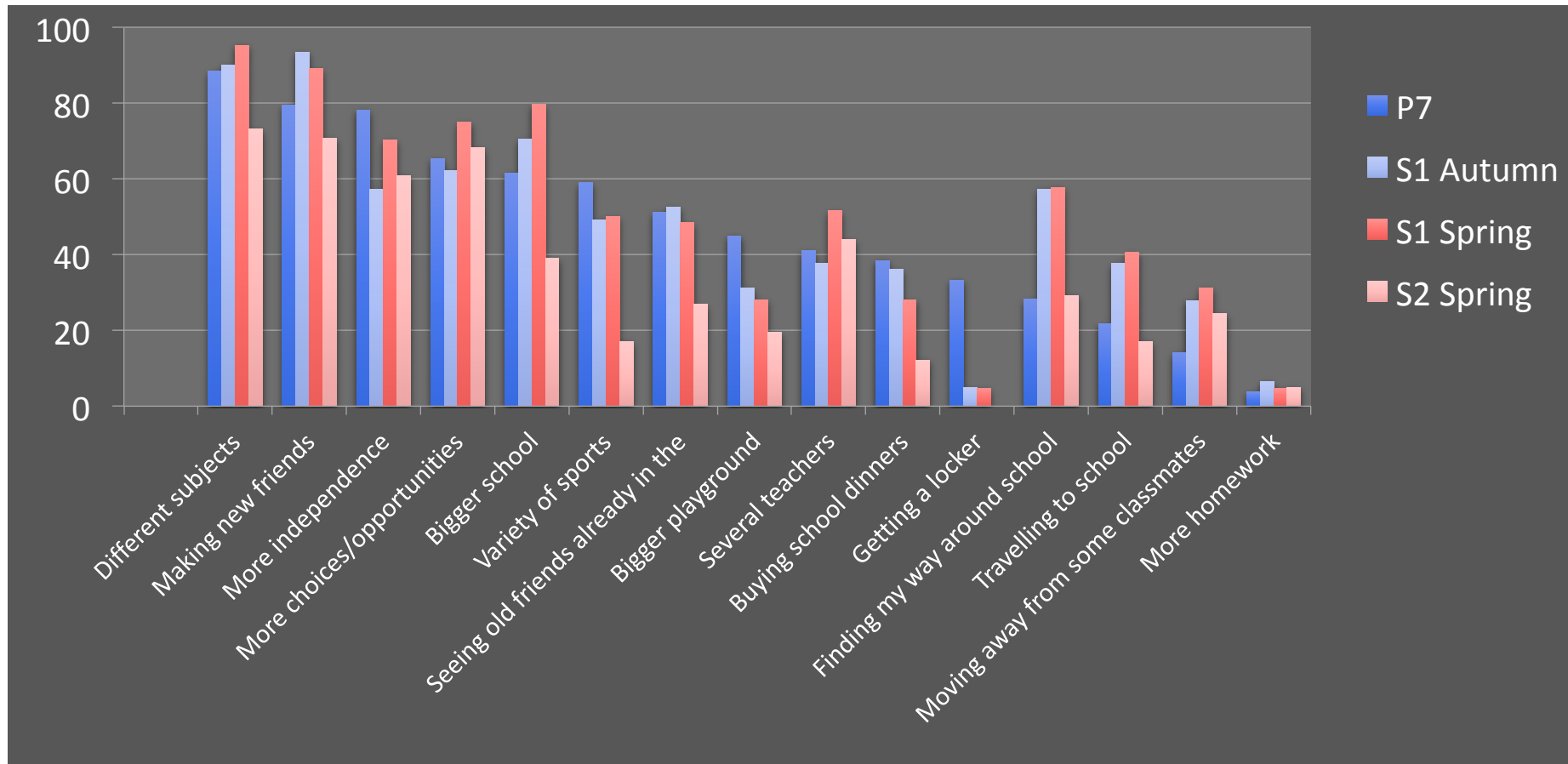
Looking forward to in P7 and what has been good in S1 and S2 (in percentage)

Jindal-Snape & Cantali (under review)
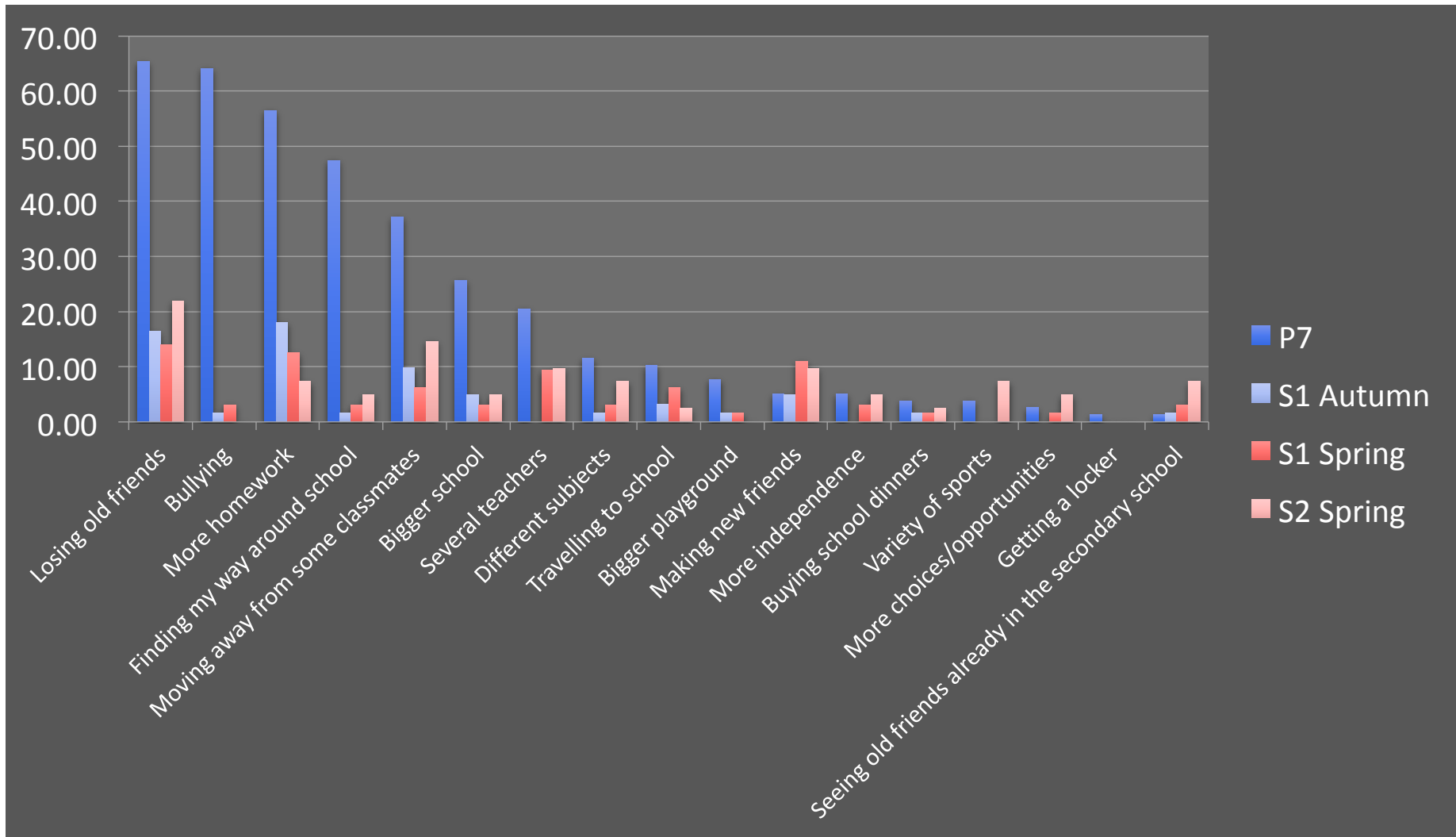
Worried about in P7 and still worrying in S1 and S2 (in percentage)

Jindal-Snape & Cantali (under review)

Positive and Negative Experiences of Pupils

	Positive Experiences	Negative Experiences
Relationships with Peers	• Wider group of friendships • Positive relations with new friends • Opportunity to reject prior social roles and transformative for their sense of identity • Opportunities to make friends with older peers as a marker of esteem	• Losing old friends • Concerns about making new friends • Bullying • Moving without any friends from their primary school • Dealing with new pupils who were older and bigger than them • (Big Fish Little Pond Effect)
Relationships with Teachers	• Clear structure and routine • Positive relations with new teachers • Dynamic, fun and knowledgeable teachers	• Different pedagogical approaches in primary and secondary schools • Perception of secondary teachers being stricter • Leaving behind primary school teachers with whom they had formed secure attachment • Lack of positive attitudes of secondary school teachers towards the pupils • Lack of respect and trust from secondary school teachers towards pupils • Secondary school teachers' higher expectations and rules, sometimes unspoken and inconsistent rules
Physical environment	• Being able to move between classes • Increased school population • Better and more resources	• Getting lost • Difficulty coping with the larger environment of the secondary school , noise and hustle making pupils with ASD feel unsafe, Acoustics in certain spaces being unpleasant for a pupil with ASN • Travelling to secondary school

Positive and Negative Experiences of Pupils (continued)

Academic matters	• Challenging work, being able to learn new and interesting things in secondary school, opportunity for growth and development • Feeling of being grown up with more responsibility • Diverse curriculum	• Harder academic work and inability to do it • Greater personal responsibility related to academic planning and organization in secondary schools • Volume of homework • Concerns about tests and assessments • Lack of curricular continuity and progression , including in music, mathematics
Engagement and motivation		• Reduced feelings of connectedness with the school • Increase in school absences • Decline in positive attitudes towards studying, especially mathematics • Decline in grades

Jindal-Snape, Cantali, MacGillivray & Hannah, 2019

What does successful transition look like?

*ol adjustment**

ood attainment

ood attendance and engagement

*l and emotional adjustment at school**

ke school and do not feel lonely at school

ense of belonging and wellbeing**

espectful, reciprocal relationships**

her words, the **Affective-Behaviour-Cognitive-** ABCs of adaptation involving sense of belonging, identification/group identity,
ral and pedagogical adaptation***

* Rice et al. (n.d.)

** Peters (2010)

*** Jindal-Snape & Rienties (2016), Jindal-Snape (2016)

Transition and Wellbeing

Impact of transitions on wellbeing: Systematic literature review (2008-2018)

ng

ast well defined term

n include emotional and psychological wellbeing, spiritual wellbeing, physical wellbeing and social wellbeing

ies focussed on at least one of these aspects

4 studies reported that transition had a positive impact on pupils' wellbeing outcomes (improvement in QoL, no dip in self-esteem rather than increase)

16 studies reported negative impact on pupils' wellbeing outcomes

- increase in school misbehaviour

- decline in feelings of school belongingness and connectedness

- poorer social and emotional health

- higher levels of depression and anxiety

e in pupils' anxiety during transitions was associated with decreased connectedness to school and decline in perceived school belongingness over

dies reported that most pupils adapted quickly to secondary school which was found to be important for wellbeing of pupils in another study.

Jindal-Snape, Cantali, MacGillivray & Hannah, 2019

bust evidence from three large scale studies (two used the same secondary dataset) at bonding with peers and teachers is important to pupils in the transition from primar secondary school

→ If bonding is positive and good social integration has happened, they helped pupils to be resilient to the transition and accompanying changes

→ However, if this bonding and the overall transition experience are negative, then pupils can experience long term mental health issues and lower educational outcomes; in some cases the latter is the result of the former

Jindal-Snape, Cantali, MacGillivray & Hannah, 2019

ransitions and Wellbeing

nxieties were linked to school move and manifested as:

- depression
- generalized anxiety
- school anxiety and emotional issues
- peer/social problems

d if unresolved, led to:

- poor outcomes in the long-term
  → poor academic attainment

- psychiatric difficulties throughout the lifespan

Neal et al., 2016; Rice et al., 2010; West et al., 2010

Understanding potential reasons: Stage-Environment Fit (unfit)

Early Adolescent Development	Post-Transfer School Environments
Increased desire for autonomy	Increase in extrinsic motivational strategies
Increased salience of identity issues	More rigorous grading practices resulting in lower average grades
Continuing need for safe environment in which to explore autonomy and identity	Increase in practices likely to incur social comparison
Increased peer orientation	Ability grouping
	Whole class instruction
Increased self-focus and self-consciousness	Normative performance grading
	Competitive motivational strategies
Increased cognitive capacity with movement toward formal operational thought	Increase in teacher concern with control
Physical and hormonal changes associated with pubertal development	Decrease in teachers' trust of students
	Decrease in opportunity for student participation in classroom decision making
	Decrease in student autonomy
	Decrease in teachers' sense of efficacy
	Initial decrease in the cognitive level of tasks

Eccles & Midgley, 1989

Differential impact on children with ASN, including poverty

Only five studies compared typically developing pupils with those who have ASN

Wider body focussed on children with ASN only

Most authors have argued that transition is more difficult for pupils with ASN

Pupils with ASN can be more vulnerable during primary-secondary transitions

Pupils with ASN can be at risk of negative educational and wellbeing outcomes

Evidence of pupils with ASN having heightened anxiety during the transition

→ negative impact on their mental health and attainment

On the other hand, some pupils with ASN preferred the more structured environment of the secondary school

Jindal-Snape, Cantali, MacGillivray & Hannah, 2019

isk and stressors

e children are considered to be at risk during transitions, such as children with autism (Schoon, 2006)
EBN (Mowat, 2019).

ever

isk factors interact with other influences

- considerable individual variability with individual differences in the anxiety levels of children (Hannah and Topping, 2012)
- might be due to difficulty in forming trusting relationships with adults and other children (Mowat, 2019)
- Other risks factors might **emerge** such as bereavement, family problems

ransition can be a time of risk for some and *create* Additional Support Needs.

ust make life easier on us and not put so much pressure on us … and stop focusing so much on all of the isabled kids and start thinking more about the ones who aren't disabled, because they might have roblems too. (Pupil, End of S2; Jindal-Snape & Cantali, under review)

Resilience

Resilience refers to a *dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity*. Implicit within this notion are two critical conditions: (1) exposure to significant threat or severe adversity; and (2) the achievement of positive adaptation despite major assaults on the developmental process." Luthar, 2007, p. 543

Does transition lead to significant adversity?

Everyday minor hassles build up (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008)

Resilience factors

The Child	The Family	The Environment
Temperament (active, good-natured)	Warm supportive parents	Supportive extended family
Female prior to and male during adolescence	Good parent-child relationships	Successful school experiences
Age (being younger)	Parental harmony	Friendship networks
Higher IQ	Valued social role (e.g. care of siblings)	Valued social role (e.g., a job, volunteering, helping neighbours)
Social skills	Close relationship with one parent	Close relationship with unrelated mentor
Personal awareness		Member of religious or faith community
Feelings of empathy		
Internal locus of control		
Humour		
Attractiveness		

Source:: Newman & Blackburn, 2002, p. 8

Risk factors

The Child	The Family	The Environment
Learning disability	High level of parental conflict	Poverty and low social capital
Genetic factors	Parental separation	Homelessness or fragile housing
Developmental delay	Lack of consistent guidance	Racism
Difficult temperament	Parent-child hostility	Unpredictable and unmanageable crises
Problems with communication	Abuse	
Chronic illness	Parental psychological disorder	
Poor educational performance	Parental alcoholism or drug dependency	
Low self-esteem	Parental criminality	
	Poor friendship networks	

Source: Newman & Blackburn, 2002, p. 8

Important to remember that, according to Rutter, "Protection…resides, *not in the evasion of risk*, but in *successful engagement* with it." (1987, p. 318)

esilience

eduction of multiple 'risks' or 'stressors' and enhancement of resilience* during school ansitions depends on:**

- internal protective factors (e.g., self-esteem: messages of self-worth and self-competence from significant others in the environment)

- external protective factors (e.g., positive relationships and secure attachments with significant others in the environment)

*Newman & Blackburn, 2002
**Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008
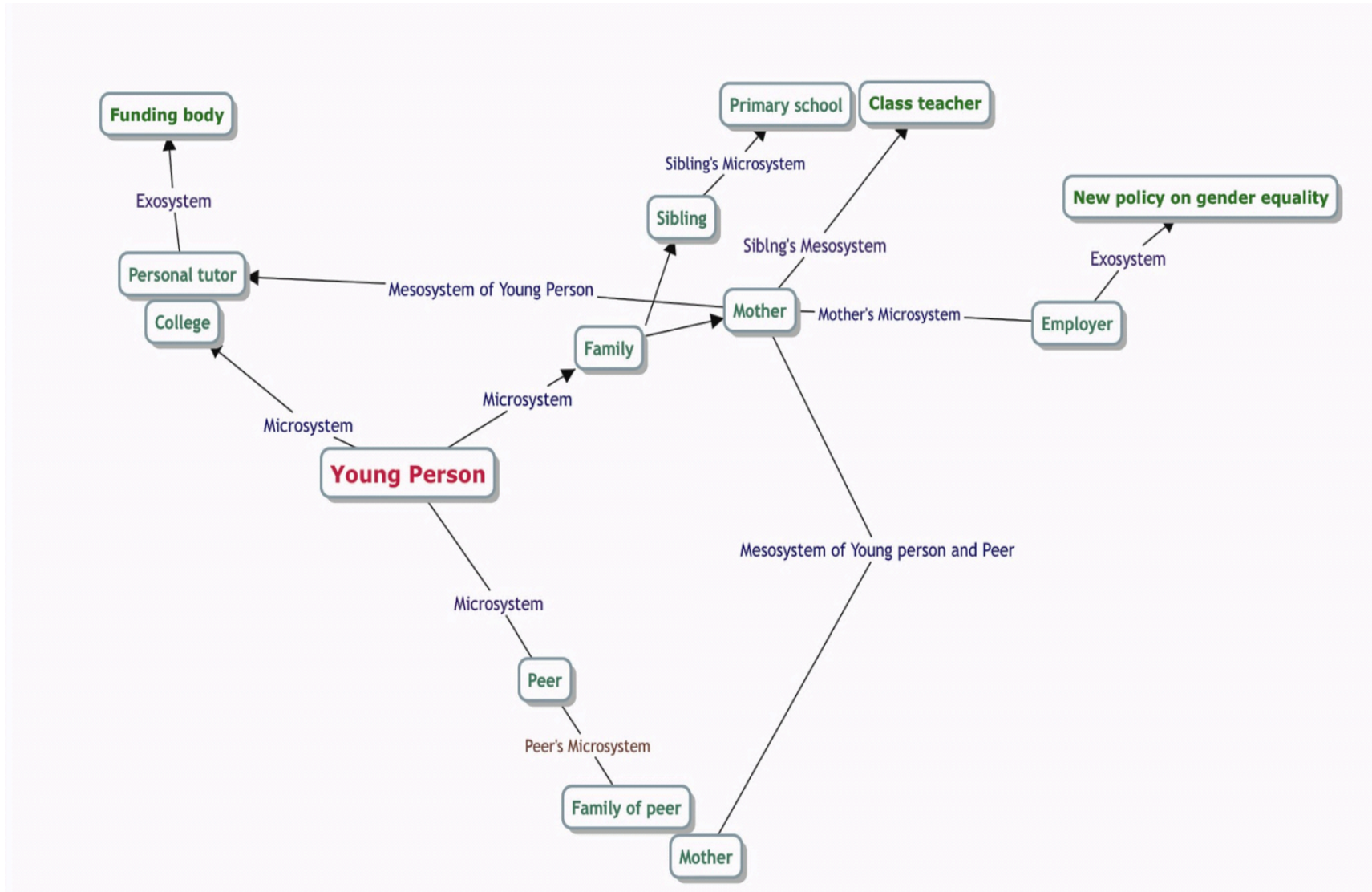
Complexity of the interaction between ecosystems, Jindal-Snape, 2016

Support system: People children spoke with most about the move to, and within, secondary school
(Pupils could choose multiple categories; in percentage)

	P7	S1 Autumn	S1 Spring	S2 Spring
My parents/grandparents	85.90	80.33	68.75	51.22
My brother/sister/cousin	50.00	47.54	31.25	26.83
My classmates in P7/S1/S2	76.92	47.54	50	24.39
My other friends who are not my classmates	34.62	44.26	32.81	26.83
My P7 teacher	34.62	19.67	10.94	4.88
My primary school head teacher	8.97	13.11	6.25	7.32
My S1 teachers/guidance teacher	33.33	19.67	31.25	21.95
My secondary school head teacher	26.92	6.56	1.56	2.44

Family: one of the few constant support mechanisms
Jindal-Snape & Cantali, under review

ing there for me and supporting my decisions.

My family help me a lot and said I will make new friends.

There's more freedom and you have more fun.

ey told us about when they went and how good

s to move from classroom to classroom.

My sister helped me because she knew what high school was like so she helped settle in.

y family let me get on with it. I think this was important

I needed to experience this on my own.
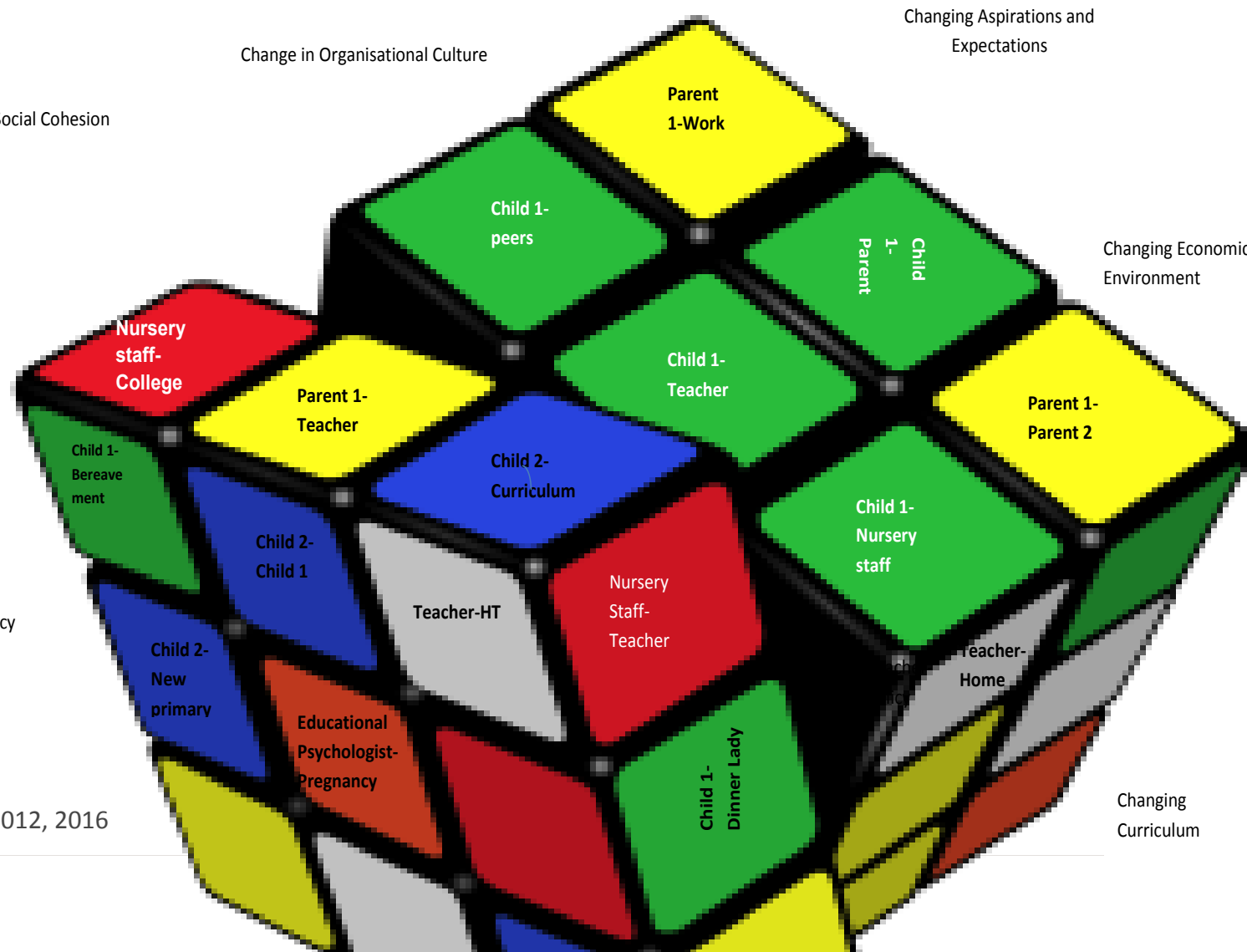
Helping me with school work, when I'm stuck.

If parents/carers are not supported in their transition, how will they support their children?

rofessionals experience transitions too

Multiple and Multi-dimensional Transitions Model*

Change in Organisational Culture

Changing Aspirations and Expectations

Change in Social Cohesion

Changing Economic Environment

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Changing Policy

Changing Curriculum

*Jindal-Snape, 2012, 2016

Parent 1-Work

Child 1-peers

Child 1-Parent

Nursery staff-College

Parent 1-Teacher

Child 1-Teacher

Parent 1-Parent 2

Child 1-Bereavement

Child 2-Curriculum

Child 1-Nursery staff

Child 2-Child 1

Teacher-HT

Nursery Staff-Teacher

Teacher-Home

Child 2-New primary

Educational Psychologist-Pregnancy

Child 1-Dinner Lady

Aspects of effective transition practice

Key aspect	Potential actions for, and by, relevant stakeholders		
	Child	Family	Professional
Familiarisation	• Visits to the new school as early as possible, e.g., to use the swimming pool or other facilities • Staff and children visiting new school • Induction days • Information pack including photos of significant people and places	• Informal visits for parents over time • Induction visits	• Reciprocal visits to interact with children and other professionals over time
Opportunities to create friendship and support networks	• Through co-curricular activities with other nurseries and schools as well as in the community (to ensure multiple, stable support networks) • Peer buddies from the same and new institution	• Formal parent networking events organised by schools • Informal networking events organised by (and through) parents, parent councils and/or Parent Teacher Associations • Adoption of a system of parent/family buddies	• Teacher buddies and shadowing across stages (potentially in the school cluster) • Creation of transition teams
Secure attachment	• Portfolios or artefacts from previous school and/or home • Building on existing secure attachments and support networks such as with parents, community clubs • Opportunities for creation of non-stigmatised secure attachments with teachers, pupil support workers and guidance staff	• Valuing the role of parents in forming secure attachments and ensuring their involvement in the transition process • Supporting parents' understanding of the role of secure attachments during transitions	• Sound school leadership from head teachers, supportive ethos and mechanisms for providing opportunities and support for staff

tinuous open munication and l a b o r a t i v e erships	• Discussions about what to expect
	• Opportunities to talk about what they are looking forward to, or worried about
		• Parents involved actively as partners
		• Effective two-way communication (not just provision of information) with parents
		• Parental input in the information that is shared about their child so as to include other aspects related to home/community and other transitions child might be experiencing
		• Opportunities to meet with staff working with their child
		• Understanding of legislative obligations of schools and local authorities and their rights, especially for children with additional support needs
			• Through reciprocal visits, intranet, and sharing of information about the child
			   o Information should focus on educational, social, and emotional aspects
			   o Parents and children should have opportunity to see the information and add to it
			• Working together to bridge the gap between pedagogical approaches and curriculum
			• Shared understanding of transition and best practice
			• Opportunities to meet with parents and other staff
			• Understanding of legislative obligations of schools and local authorities and children/parents' rights, especially for children with additional support needs
			• Working collaboratively with other agencies involved in the life of the child as relevant
			• Early identification of support needs of child

Co-curricular activities	• School fair • Residential trips (especially for older children) • Clubs/activities in the community to foster sense of belonging		
Training and support for transitions	• Rehearsing in a safe environment using creative approaches, such as creative drama, sketches, stories	• Increased understanding of own transition support needs	• Better provision of transitions training in qualifying programmes • Enhanced CPD provision • Increased understanding of own transition support needs and clear mechanism of organisational support
Active learning, participation and agency	• Opportunities to participate actively in their learning in preparation for transition to different educational stages • Opportunities and ethos suitable to develop learner agency	• Active participation in all aspects of transitions and child's learning	• Peer education opportunities • Opportunities and ethos suitable to develop professionals' agency

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References available on request

Illustrations by Graham Ogilvie