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Facilitating a positive transition

Facilitating a positive transition: exploring the factors that support social, emotional and mental wellbeing from primary to secondary school

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The transition from primary school to secondary school can be a difficult time for young people, yet little is known about what schools do to support the social, emotional, and mental wellbeing (SEMWB) of their pupils during this period. The purpose of this research is to explore the ways in which an urban Scottish secondary school and two of its local feeder primary schools attempt to support their pupils' SEMWB as they make this transition. A case study design was adopted to create a rich and situated account of teachers' experiences and perceptions about transition approaches through semi structured interviews. Participants were teachers in the secondary school, a large primary school serving a relatively affluent area and a smaller primary school in a more diverse, less affluent area. Thematic analysis of the data led to the identification of three inter-connected themes underpinning the ability of schools to support their pupils' transition effectively: positive relationships, positive communities, and positive environments. This suggests that teachers adopt a broadly socio-ecological perspective, viewing transition as a multi-faceted process, in which not only individual pupil characteristics but also social, cultural, and relational factors are important. However, within this broad framework, teachers' precise understanding of SEMWB varied within and across contexts, suggesting the importance of leadership and of a shared understanding, both within each school and across a cluster of schools. Teachers should also be supported to evaluate their initiatives and the impact these have on transition.

Keywords: social & emotional wellbeing; transition; mental health promotion

Introduction

The current education curriculum in Scotland, Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), was introduced in 2010. Within CfE, the curricular area 'health and wellbeing' (HWB) is the responsibility of all teachers of children and young people aged 3-18 years (Scottish Government, 2009) and aims to develop pupils' 'knowledge and understanding, skills, capabilities and attributes which they need for mental, emotional, social and physical

wellbeing now and in the future' (Scottish Government, 2009, p.1). While the promotion and support of mental, social and emotional wellbeing in schools always formed a core part of CfE, more recently, there has been a marked increase in the reported rates of young people suffering from mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Scottish Government, 2018). These upward trends in mental health issues have led to greater emphasis on positive mental health promotion by policymakers in many countries (Patton et al., 2000).

Positive mental health promotion is a collective action requiring 'intersectoral linkage' (WHO, 2004, p.11) due to the multiple individual, societal, and economic factors that influence mental health. It is commonly defined as any effort taken to increase the social and emotional wellbeing of a group, society or individuals and any action designed to increase both an individual and a community's capacity to experience and maintain positive mental health (Holt, 2019). This study focuses on social, emotional, and mental wellbeing (SEMWB) as components of positive mental health and includes the planned support of SEMWB in schools as positive mental health promotion.

The recent Mental Health Strategy 2017-2027 published by the Scottish Government aims to both prevent and treat mental health problems in Scotland and underscores the important role that schools play in this endeavour, especially in terms of prevention. It emphasises the need for schools to create a positive culture, supporting and developing young people's confidence and resilience. It also calls for evidence-based approaches to promote social, emotional, and mental health and reduce the factors that might be detrimental to positive social, emotional, and mental health (Scottish Government, 2017).

However, to date, we know little about the ways in which schools aim to achieve this in their own unique contexts. This also raises important and interesting issues related to the period of transition from the final year of Primary School (P7) to the first year of Secondary School (S1), a significant time in the lives of many young people (Jindal-Snape et al, 2019). We know little about this transition, how pupil SEMWB is supported, and how this support aligns with the Scottish Government's endeavours to promote positive SEMWB in all schools. Consequently, the purpose of this research is to explore the factors that contribute to the ways in which a Scottish secondary school and its local feeder primary schools attempt to support their pupils' positive SEMWB as they move from P7 to S1.

The complexities of SEMWB in primary and secondary schools

SEMWB promotion is both multi-faceted and complex. Furthermore, it is essential that SEMWB approaches are specifically tailored to the unique local context of each school community, with whole-school approaches having greater impact on health and academic outcomes compared to more targeted approaches (Adamowitsch et al., 2017; Cefai & Camilleri, 2015). Characteristics of effective whole-school approaches include: school-wide implementation, community involvement, consistent and effective communication across the school, developing positive relationships between pupils and teachers in the classroom and providing pupils with opportunities for responsibility and participation (Patton et al., 2000). As context is so important, there are likely to be stark differences between SEMWB promotion both within and across primary and secondary contexts.

Regardless of context, McLaughlin and Clarke (2010) emphasise the importance of school connectedness and explain that it has been shown to be a protective factor that lowers the likelihood of health-risk behaviour while also enhancing positive educational outcomes. They report that the most important dimension of school connectedness is attachment to teachers, enhanced when teachers are perceived to be positive, caring, fair, respectful, who listen and engage the pupils in decision-making. Supporting this view, Jindal-Snape et al. (2019) report that those pupils who have good relationships with teachers, friends and parents have better social integration skills and are more able to deal with change. Furthermore, positive pupil-teacher relationships are not only important for pupil academic and wellbeing outcomes, but also for positive teacher wellbeing. The interpersonal relationships that teachers have with their pupils can positively affect their job satisfaction, enjoyment, and motivation, but can also be a source of stress or negative emotions (Roffey, 2012). Poor teacher wellbeing can influence teacher effectiveness, motivation, or retention which in turn can decrease overall school wellbeing and pupil wellbeing.

Positive SEMWB promotion is likely to differ between primary and secondary schools largely due to the structural differences between the two contexts, and the extent to which they limit or promote the development of positive relationships. For example, a child's time at primary school is usually spent in fairly consistent communities, where pupils interact closely with their class teacher and peers. This may provide teachers with time and space to develop trusting teacher-pupil and teacher-parent relationships, which have both been found to have a positive effect on pupil outcomes (Jindal-Snape et al., 2019; Santiago et al., 2016). This consistency may also allow teachers time to develop stable pedagogic approaches which have been shown to create a school environment in which pupils feel safe and a sense of belonging, though

we recognise this is not the case in all schools or for all pupils (Adelman & Taylor, 2010; Lynn et al., 2003).

In comparison, secondary schools are much larger in scale and are organised around subject specialisms with greater emphasis on academic attainment. Pupils can work with several different teachers for short periods of time over the course of a day and a week, which may make it difficult for secondary teachers to develop positive relationships with pupils or to communicate whole school initiatives. Secondary school teachers may also find it difficult to break free from more direct and less interactive teaching approaches (Lendrum, et al., 2013). Patton et al. (2000) claim that the biggest challenge for secondary schools in relation to implementing health and wellbeing initiatives is that changes in instructional patterns take time, and that it is extremely difficult to develop a pedagogical culture towards greater collaborative relationships between pupils and teachers. Furthermore, Scottish teachers often face structural or cultural contexts emphasising attainment and accountability measures which may constrain their pedagogic autonomy to those that lead to performance and attainment goals (Hardley et al., 2020, Priestley & Minty, 2013). Thus, the nature and structure of a school system has a significant influence on the relationships, ethos, and sense of community within the school (Lendrum et al., 2013). Successful school health promotion is more likely when universal approaches that take into account each school's unique context are adopted and balanced with more targeted initiatives. These targeted interventions seek to reduce specific risks or increase the capacity of individuals or groups to have positive mental wellbeing (Wright, 2009). For example, in order for pupils to be able to contribute positively to and benefit from a whole school approach they might need targeted interventions such as conflict resolution or coping with loss. Central to school SEMWB approaches is that they are developed in school by

a team that includes teachers, parents and other relevant stakeholders (Beatty &

Campbell-Evans, 2020; Perry et al, 2008). They work together to develop a flexible and

responsive structure to suit the local needs of the school.

Importantly, while implementation issues in both primary and secondary schools

impact the success of SEMWB interventions, the involvement of teachers and other

stakeholders is not always straightforward. For example, in an evaluation of 48

secondary schools implementing the SEAL project in England, Lendrum et al. (2013),

found that the will of the teachers to engage in health promotion activities and whole

school strategies, as well as their knowledge and skills, acted as barriers to successful

implementation. Importantly, the most successful programmes for SEMWB promotion

included measures to overcome teachers' perceived skill or confidence deficits, such as

well-planned professional learning and quality time working together as a school

community to reach a shared understanding of what is required and why (Kelly et al.,

2004). Indeed, many have argued that greater investment in teacher learning is critical,

not only to effective health promotion (Patton et al., 2000), but also to the promotion of

positive teacher SEMWB. When teacher learning focuses on the development of team

skills, collaboration and positive learning, then both pupil and teacher SEMWB is

enhanced (Ross et al., 2012).

Teacher learning is clearly important, not only to enable them to develop and

embed effective health promotion strategies in context, but also to encourage them to

think deeply about what health and wellbeing actually means and how it influences

what they do (Spratt, 2016). However, this issue is complicated by the fact that the term

wellbeing is not well-defined within policy text (Hardley et al., 2020; Spratt, 2017) and

several discourses from fields outside education have crept into school wellbeing

policy, for example, 'flourishing' (Spratt, 2016), economic (Burrows & Wright, 2007),

and 'care' (Spratt, 2017). This has implications in relation to how health and wellbeing is addressed in school. For example, medicalised discourses may lead some to adopt a deficit perspective, believing that health promotion should be concerned with the treatment and prevention of diagnosable conditions (Ekornes et al., 2012). By contrast, those who engage with flourishing discourses are likely to adopt an assets approach, focused on the assets and capabilities of individuals, and the role that teachers play in providing all pupils with opportunities to make decisions about their health and wellbeing in a way that is worthwhile to them (Hardley et al.,2020).

Transition from primary school to secondary school

The transition from primary school to secondary school can be a difficult time for many young people. It comes at a time in their lives when they are increasingly concerned about their autonomy and when there is a shift in the importance of relationships from adults to their peers (McLauglin & Clarke, 2010). At this personally challenging time, the move from primary to secondary involves changes in school environments, social relationships, academic work and expectations. Reflecting these changes, research has highlighted common worries about transition including, getting lost, fear of being bullied, being separated from friends, homework and academic expectations (Smith et al., 2008). It can be a difficult time for some young people to negotiate, causing stress and anxiety, and may lead to a range of negative outcomes such as poor attendance, grades and behaviours (Rice et al., 2011).

However, while research exploring the impact of transition on young people's wellbeing is mixed, there is some evidence to suggest that it can be a positive experience for young people (Jindal-Snape et al., 2019). When young people expect to have a positive transition to secondary school, they are more likely to experience a

positive transition (ibid). Furthermore, this experience is enhanced when they enter secondary schools that promote a strong sense of belonging. Although the school plays a critical role in supporting the transition process, personal characteristics are also important factors in determining a successful or unsuccessful transition. For example, young people who cope well with transition are those with good problem-solving skills, self-regulation skills and those with stable friendships (Jindal-Snape et al., 2019). Those who have poor transition experiences tend to be younger pupils and those who are less academically able (Anderson et al., 2000). It is important, therefore, for teachers to pay some attention to these characteristics and help young people to develop the personal skills that empower and enable them to understand and navigate their new life in secondary school. However, few schools take a longer-term view of transition, developing skills throughout the final year of primary school to support personal characteristics that are likely to help with transition.

There is no doubt that the transition from primary to secondary school can be a challenging time for many pupils. However, focusing on the challenges and the negative outcomes associated with transition can lead to discourse and research that reinforces and reproduces a deficit approach. It assumes that all pupils will be negatively affected, and most schools are unable to effectively support SEMWB or academic attainment during transition. This position focuses on problems rather than benefits and limits what we know and can learn from the success stories from the field. It is important, therefore, that future research focuses more on the positive aspects of transition to understand what works and why.

Promoting positive health and wellbeing: a socio-ecological perspective

It is clear from the literature that there are multiple factors that contribute to how schools attempt to promote positive SEMWB and transitions, and not all are located within the school. Consistent with this, Barry (2009) identifies psychosocial, community level and structural level determinants to health promotion and argues that effective promotion will work at all these levels. This reflects a socio-ecological perspective, which argues that pupils operate within a social ecosystem that is unique to each individual and to each school setting, and attempts to understand how these interactions might affect pupil behaviours.

The various levels can affect pupil wellbeing through aspects like having supportive relationships or role models, safer neighbourhoods, availability of extra support or after-school programmes. The interactions between pupils and their contextual environments would suggest that interventions that include pupils' social networks and environments may be more effective than those only focusing on individual characteristics. However, this can be challenging, and in some school contexts, there may be factors at various levels that limit the extent to which health promoting initiatives can be successfully embedded within the culture of the school and its community. Embedding effective health promoting approaches into a school, therefore, may mean making significant structural changes to a school system (Adelman & Taylor, 2010). Thus, research that aims to investigate health and wellbeing at transition should consider this school ecosystem, adopt a broader perspective, and seek to understand the multiple factors that shape pupil experience.

Consequently, for the current research, we adopted a socio-ecological approach to explore the various factors that contribute to SEMWB promotion as pupils move from the final year in Primary School (P7) to the first year of Secondary School (S1).

Importantly, rather than focussing solely on the barriers to the implementation of SEMWB promotion during transition, we focused on what a secondary school and its feeder primary schools do to support their pupils' wellbeing during this time. More specifically, we aimed to uncover how teachers understand SEMWB, the approaches they developed and adopted to support SEMWB and finally, those factors that have enabled them to promote positive SEMWB during this period.

Research design

In this study, we set out to gather rich detail on the perceptions and experiences of teachers involved in the development and enactment of approaches to support the SEMWB of pupils and their transition from Primary to Secondary school. For this reason, we adopted a case study design to create a rich and situated account of the transition approaches (Cohen et al., 2007). It was determined that in-depth, one-to-one, semi–structured interviews were the most appropriate way to achieve such data (Barbour, 2006).

Sample

Secondary schools in Scotland tend to take in pupils from a cluster of feeder primary schools. Our sample included participants from one secondary school and teachers from two of the feeder primary schools. Representation from all feeder primaries would have been desirable but participant workload constraints reduced participant availability. Within schools, we sought to include both a teacher who was responsible for pupil transition and one with responsibility for health and wellbeing (if they were not the same person), but ultimately our sample was one of convenience, comprised of those potential participants in each school willing and available to engage in the research.

The final sample comprised six participants:

- A support for learning teacher from the secondary school

- A guidance (pastoral support) teacher from the secondary school

- Two teachers from a large feeder school in a relatively affluent part of the city; one a support for learning teacher and the other a member of the school senior management team

- Two teachers from a feeder school in a smaller more diverse, less affluent area of the city; one involved in working with pupils before transition; the other a family support teacher

The secondary school was recruited to the sample first through one of the authors' professional networks. A member of the school's senior leadership team acted as a gatekeeper to the secondary school and then to the feeder primary schools.

During each semi-structured interview, a range of questions was asked to generate discussion on health and wellbeing provision within the school and practice around transition. Questions also explored the participants' perspectives and understanding of positive health and wellbeing and their understanding of initiatives used and the background to such initiatives. The fifty to sixty-minute sessions, held in the school in a room free from distraction, allowed time for participants to relax into the interview and for the researcher to ask participants to expand upon original responses to questions, consistent with the research questions.

Ethics

This project was carried out in compliance with the BERA Ethical guidance. It received ethical approval from both the University Ethics Committee and the City Council in which the participant schools were located. All participants gave informed consent,

aware of the aims of the project and that the research team would be sensitive in relation to discussing their views. A responsibility to abide by safeguarding regulations was also stated in the participant information and consent form.

Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach, which is a method used to identify, analyse, and describe patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis broadly occurs in three main stages: data familiarisation, initial coding, and identifying themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All of the research team were involved in the data familiarisation part of the analysis process, engaging in in-depth discussion about participants' responses. Further data familiarisation occurred through repeated reading and pre-coding of each transcript identifying what might be salient for answering the research questions. Initial coding was completed by reading excerpts and coding line-by-line using gerunds to summarise the schools' actions, discourses, or beliefs about HWB. The use of gerunds and verbs is posited as a way to show participants' actions and stay close to the data (Charmaz, 2014).

Initial codes were then refined into focused codes by looking for similarities and combining them into broader categories to encapsulate shared topics or focus and create final codes. The final codes were then analysed and led to the identification of three overarching themes concerning the importance of 1. positive relationships, 2. positive communities, and 3. positive environments on schools' ability to support pupil transition.

Discussion of Results

How teachers conceptualise social, emotional and mental wellbeing

How social, emotional and mental wellbeing is conceptualised by individuals and groups has a significant influence on the ways in which SEMWB is promoted (Ekornes et al., 2012). It is much harder to implement a coordinated strengths-based universal approach to health promotion if teachers have a deficit view mainly conceptualising emotional and mental health in relation to illness or problems to be fixed. (Graham et al., 2011). In our study, when conceptualising SEMWB, teachers often viewed it holistically as social competency, positive emotions and emotional regulation, and mental health. Emotional wellbeing was conceptualised as positive emotional states and emotional regulation, often articulated as 'being happy', 'looking on the bright side', and 'even-keeled'. In this way, most participants' descriptions of their concept SEMWB included some or all of the characteristics of positive wellbeing recurrent in the literature; the ability to enjoy life, a sense of confidence, resilience, healthy social and emotional development and the ability to engage in positive relationships (Rothi et al., 2008). However, at times, a deficit understanding of mental health was demonstrated with reference to mental health problems such as 'anxiety' and 'stress'. Similarly, social wellbeing was at times equated with social skill or competency and was often referred to using deficit language such as 'social anxiety' or 'shy'.

These broad conceptualisations of SEMWB are implicit in the initiatives that schools undertook to support transition. The analysis resulted in the initiatives being positioned within three broad and interconnected areas:

- Developing relationships
- Connecting with the community

- Creating a positive school environment

These three initiative areas relate to a socio-ecological perspective by showing that schools not only focus on individual pupil characteristics but also recognise the effects on pupils of social, cultural, and relational factors. Notably, while the themes are listed as three distinct domains, the findings point to them being interconnected where a change in one may affect change in another. For clarity, each theme is discussed separately, but thematic overlaps will be discussed when necessary. Additionally, due to the small sample size and close relationship between the participating schools, participant quotes are only labelled by school context (primary or secondary) in order to reduce the chance of identification.

Theme 1 - positive relationships

When describing factors that influence transition, all educators noted the importance of positive relationships to supporting pupil transitions. Implicit in this focus is the assumption that an important contributor to forming relationships is social competency. Participants appeared to view pupils who had difficulty with social interaction as needing additional help to form positive relationships. Consistent with Lester and Cross' (2015) finding that a child's time in primary school is an important opportunity to form strong friendship groups that will provide support to each other in the years around transition, participants discussed the ways in which they fostered social development. Friendships with peers in the same class and across the school were encouraged:

'So we did that and we, the program that was developed was for the whole class to be able to do and it was kind of designed with a view to think about the move

to high school so a lot of the things were then related to when you go into a new situation and you meet these people that you've not met before, these are things that you might have as conversation starter. This is what they might be thinking about you. This is what you're thinking about them.' Primary School Teacher

This resonates with a wealth of research that identifies that it is easier to manage transition and change at any age when you have friends, particularly if they are going through the same transition (Waters, et al., 2014; McLaughlin & Clarke, 2010)

As relationships 'dominate the transition experience' (Lester & Cross, 2015, p.2), it is not enough to have friendships in primary school, pupils need the social and emotional competencies, the confidence, self-efficacy and experience to make new friendships (ibid). Participants also recognised the need for pupils, particularly those from smaller schools, to expand their friendship groups by socialising with pupils from other schools. Consistent with Lester and Cross (2015)'s *social architecture*, participants spoke in detail about the various initiatives that aimed to foster social interaction within new, larger social groups. For example:

'Because we know that we are smaller schools, sometimes we can get swallowed up in transition events because the other schools in the cluster are so much larger... we will do residential camps together with the children from the other small school in the cluster. At camp they're interacting with other children from different schools that will be going into their year so that when they go up to secondary school they're not overpowered.' Primary School Teacher

The overlap between the themes of our research is consistent with the inter-connectivity of a socio-ecological perspective and is evident from this discussion of positive relationships. The participants were not just aware of the importance of friendships; they were also working collaboratively across schools and with community partners to enact their responsibility to nurture the development and strength of relationships between pupils. Participants' descriptions of their work to support SEMWB are consistent with evaluation and review of a range of approaches to both SEMWB promotion and transition (Beatty & Campbell-Evans, 2020). There is consensus within this literature that the school has a responsibility to build 'communities ….in which young people can have sustaining and meaningful relationships' (McLaughlin & Clarke, 2010, p.99)

It is not only peer relationships that enhance pupil wellbeing. When speaking about supporting pupils, participants referenced pupil-teacher relationships and the importance of 'trusted adults' to foster pupil wellbeing:

> 'I think one of the key things is being able to communicate and having trusted relationships. We often will get the child to take control of that and decide who the trusted adult will be that they can come speak to.' Primary School Teacher

The teacher-pupil relationships described by participants resonate with those described by Murray and Pianta (2007) as relationships in which there is openness, warmth and trust alongside instruction and support. This primary school participant emphasised the care and value they felt for the children in their class:

> 'We're invested in their wellbeing, their nurture, we want to make sure they're safe, we have high expectations for them to go on and do bigger and better things.'

Whether in primary or secondary school, such supportive relationships with teachers provide a protective factor in pupils' social and emotional wellbeing (Lester & Cross, 2015) and can be a predictor of ongoing positive emotional wellbeing, particularly through times of change such as transition (Moore et al., 2017).

Primary school teachers also acknowledged that it must be much harder for their secondary school colleagues to get to know their pupils as well and to form such trusting relationships:

'That's a huge workload on the teachers to build up a relationship with all these wee children so quickly.' Primary School Teacher

Perceived support was also a significant contributor to pupil wellbeing:

'We've got a big support for learning room and that's open at break and lunch times. They know they can just drop in and there's always someone on call, that they can speak to you and discuss their problems.' Secondary School Teacher

Whether or not pupils choose to make use of this room, its presence and availability is what matters as McLaughlin and Clarke (2010) conclude that perceptions of support are beneficial to pupil wellbeing even if the support is not actually accessed or provided.

Participants' descriptions of how they demonstrate the support of teachers and provide opportunities to build positive relationships between staff and pupils once again illustrate the interconnectedness of themes of positive relationships and positive environments evident in our findings.

Notably, the importance of relationships was not only those between pupils or between pupils and teachers. The participants also pointed out the importance of staff

relationships. All participants showed appreciation of being part of a supportive staff team:

> 'The support from the staff was unbelievable. We've got a really strong team that really like each other's company. So we're really lucky that way.' Primary School Teacher

Furthermore, when staff felt supported by the senior leaders it meant they could be more flexible with suggesting or carrying forward curricular changes to support pupils. For example, when describing who drives transition initiatives:

> 'Some of it comes from teachers. A lot of it does come probably from top down… my direct manager has the overview for health and wellbeing. He's very good at saying, 'Look these are the priorities and this is what we need to be focusing on.' But as part of that I think the school are good at listening to the staff and the pupils and drawing on that.' Secondary School Teacher

Again, these statements recognise that teachers promoting SEMWB at transition benefit from school leaders who understand SEMWB, as such leaders are better able to inspire and motivate their colleagues to embed and sustain promotion practices (Hallam, 2009). Beatty and Campbell-Evans (2020) identified the benefits to pupil SEMWB from successful leadership, such as their ability to nurture a collaborative culture and build positive relationships among and with staff teams. The culture and relationships described by participants suggest that such leadership and support were part of their school culture.

Theme 2- positive communities

When describing transitions, all the school staff members noted the importance of relationships, not only within schools, but also outside of the school. Hence, the theme of 'positive communities' takes into account that schools do not operate in isolation. Participants recognised the value of their work with parents:

> 'We have great partnerships with our parents…looking at the feedback we get from our parents….I think obviously that's a great thing because if the parents feel that they're safe and getting nurtured in school the kids will hopefully get this feeling as well.' Primary School Teacher

For a true joined up approach to supporting pupil transition, all parties must work together. For example, the family support teacher whose role spans social, emotional and learning:

> 'I work with children but the biggest part, probably bigger than that, is working with families and the parents, and trying to involve them in their child's learning. I do home visits. If people have a housing problem I'll look into that ….. if I phone and say these kids are not sleeping because there's mice in their flat they'll go out and kill them. When the parent phones and asks for the same thing they ignore them. So sometimes it's just the matter of someone intervening. That is me.' Primary School Teacher

This school's practice shows evidence that they are engaging with the societal factors that influence pupil wellbeing, without which, according to Moore et al. (2017), school approaches to health promotion will have 'limited impact'.

Furthermore, staff also noted that collaborative working can assist schools by establishing a coherent and clear message with the 'trusted others' in pupils' lives. For example:

> 'We talk about transition throughout the year, there's various stages where it's everyone involved as well as private chats. We talk to families about it, we give them staging posts along the way, we work really closely with the high school and it just builds up so that it's an easier handover, there's no surprises.'
> Primary School Teacher

All participants acknowledged the importance of collaboration with parents in their work to support pupils through transition. Parents are widely recognised as valuable partners in the SEMWB support of their children (Cushman et al., 2011) and vital to the success wellbeing promotion initiatives (Nelson & While, 2002), including transitions (Jindal-Snape et al., 2019). Participants highlight that collaborative working with parents provides an important source of information to increase schools' knowledge about the child and ability to assist them. For example:

> 'It needs to be a collaborative approach …it's a combined effort. Ultimately, we've only got your child for 22 hours a week. It's not a great deal of time... So, we need to work in partnership with the parents….We have a great school community. We have a great ethos, we have great partnerships with our parents.'
> Primary School Teacher

This excerpt reinforces previous findings that children with responsive and engaged parents transition more positively (Jindal-Snape et al., 2019).

Additionally, secondary school teachers acknowledge the need to include other staff members alongside parents in their work to support pupils' SEMWB:

'Sometimes its teachers identifying it (pupil need), sometimes it's us sort of having to look and say, 'Oh gosh, look at this class list you've got all of these guys that we work with, we really need to put something in place there.' And it can be parents as well, so, particularly for the really sort of shy and vulnerable ones that can sometimes disappear into a classroom, you know slip through the cracks.' Secondary School Teacher

These comments note the importance of working together because school is only one aspect of a child's life. Parents are valuable partners with schools because they understand what happens in their child's life outside of school. Participants spoke of holding information evenings for parents to explain transition or to share their work on SEMWB promotion. This reinforces that all those involved in supporting pupils need a common understanding of transition and the school's support for wellbeing (Ekornes et al. 2012; Kidger et al. 2009).

Conversely, schools also noted a breakdown in community support or collaboration as a hindrance to supporting pupil transition and pupil wellbeing. One participant spoke of the difficulty in accessing outside help like Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS):

'Accessing support for teenagers with mental health issues is becoming more challenging…. When I first started working here we had monthly meetings where outside professionals like social work, and CAMHS, come along and we discuss the most high-tariff kids, and look for solutions to problems. We now

never get any representation from CAMHS. Or health in general. They're just

too busy.' Secondary School Teacher

Green et al. (2005) agree that there needs to be good communication and

interdisciplinary collaboration with other agencies involved in SEMWB health

promotion, and that school approaches must be compatible with community approaches.

Our findings reinforce that schools are only one ecosystem surrounding pupils, but that

schools cannot act as an island. Schools operate better when they can also depend upon

support from external agencies, and when this access breaks down support suffers

(Nelson & While, 2002).

Theme 3 - positive environments

Physical and material environment

When describing the factors that affect pupil transition, all participants noted material

factors like time, economic resources, or physical space as impacting pupil wellbeing

and transition support. These environmental factors can have both positive or negative

effects on the schools' ability to support pupil wellbeing. For example, physical space

could be a resource, such as one primary school noting accessibility of a 'sensory room'

where all pupils could go relax in a more calming environment. However, this can also

be a risk factor, as highlighted here within the secondary school in a discussion about

helping pupils cope with the transition to a much busier school environment.

> 'The site itself is getting busier, and that's something that's really difficult for us
>
> to manage …… and we've got kids saying oh you know, 'I want a safe space, I
>
> want somewhere quiet that I can go.' Trying to find an empty classroom in this
>
> building is not even possible.' Secondary School Teacher

This is a common thread within school wellbeing research which identifies buildings in poor condition and over-crowded spaces as barriers to effective SEMWB support (Nelson & While, 2002). Whilst this may apply to both primary and secondary schools, the detrimental impact can be intensified in secondary school where there are a greater number of pupils, more complex timetabling, and a larger, busier school site. This resonates with Lendrum et al.'s (2013) finding that the complexities of the secondary school setting increase many barriers to SEMWB promotion. Pupils need to feel safe and secure and sometimes this is threatened by the physical structure of a building and over-crowding.

Social and emotional environment

School environment is much more than the physical building and material space. The social and emotional environment is arguably of greater importance and features most prominently in participants' discussion of their work to support SEMWB at transition. A health promoting ethos provides social and emotional support for all involved (Adelman & Taylor, 2006).

> Social and emotional wellbeing support is 'at the centre of everything we do, it's the most important thing for the children, the families, the teachers, for all the staff. It's crucial because learning and teaching can't happen unless people are feeling well and valued and respected.' Primary School Teacher

Having an inclusive and supportive environment can help everyone connected with the school feel included, engaged, and valued. This reflects previous research that found when pupils and staff identify and feel connected to the school it has an effect on their sense of belonging and wellbeing (Bizumic et al. 2009). Oldfield et al. (2016) define

school connectedness as a sense of belonging through feeling accepted, respected, and supported by the school community. The behaviours described by participants illustrate ways in which the children not only demonstrate this connectedness but are valuing and welcoming of others:

> 'Being very inclusive for having a very positive ethos. People say when they arrive at this school they immediately felt welcome. …no matter who came in new to the school, they could have been purple with green feelers and bobble eyes and the kids in my class would have gone 'Hi! My name's Frank, do you want to play at playtime?' That's what the kids are like.' Primary School Teacher

Here you can see how relationships build a health promoting ethos and in turn the ethos fosters positive relationships and a sense of belonging.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to explore the factors that contribute to the ways in which a Scottish secondary school and its local feeder primary schools attempt to support their pupils' positive SEMWB as they move from P7 to S1. This has been identified by previous research as being a challenging time for young people; however, Jindal-Snape et al. (2019) noted that much of this research was framed by negative questions which assume that there will be problems and, therefore, may be more likely to find problems. This has resulted in a call for future research to adopt a more positive approach. We have responded to this call by asking teachers in one secondary school and two feeder primary schools what they are doing that they perceive to be successful for promoting SEMWB during transition.

Given this positive framing, the teachers identified several strategies they had developed and enacted to support young people's SEMWB during transition. In both primary and secondary schools, transition was seen as broader than a one off event in the final term of P7 and first months of S1. As such, SEMWB at transition was not seen as a fixed point in time, but part of an ongoing process to promote SEMWB throughout the school. Consequently, schools did not identify just one approach, but had multiple ideas and strategies situated within different levels of the socio ecological model. For example, the teachers suggested strong relationships with pupils promoted a sense of belonging. They also identified relationships and working collaboratively with other teachers and external partners as essential to effective delivery. Further to this, good relationships with senior leaders - a relationship that was two-way, not top-down - were also seen as essential so that while school leaders might drive school initiatives, teachers would also have a voice in the planning and decision-making process.

However, the results of our study suggest that teachers have a varied understanding of SEMWB within and across contexts, which could be because their conceptual understanding is influenced by their beliefs of what it is to be a teacher and the role of schools (Ekornes et al., 2012). Although participants had differing conceptualisations, one thing they had in common was the recognition of SEMWB as multi-faceted which meant that they enacted SEMWB promotion in a multi-faceted manner (e.g. through embedded whole school approaches such as emotional literacy programmes and close partnership with parents that included support and targeted interventions for specific children).

Nevertheless, an important implication of a varied understanding of SEMWB is that different conceptualisations may result in different actions and priorities when promoting SEMWB across contexts. While this did not seem to be problematic in the

current study, previous research suggests it could cause tensions and challenges. Without strong leadership and a shared understanding there is potential for approaches to lack cohesion, evaluation and the consistency essential to success (Cushman et al. 2011). To promote SEMWB at transition, it is not only important to have strong leadership and a shared understanding within each school, but there also needs to be a shared understanding across a cluster of schools.

Additionally, whilst the focus of our questions and this project was to identify the positive features of SEMWB promotion and transition, teachers also described some of the challenges, for example, resources to provide calm spaces for pupils and the need for more support from specialists. Furthermore, while participants shared strategies around supporting pupil SEMWB, what was noticeably absent was any reference to evaluating these strategies. Given the Scottish Mental Health Strategy's aim to increase evidence-based approaches to supporting SEMWB, this raises important questions about how teachers might be best supported to evaluate their initiatives and the impact they have on transition.

Future research in this area is warranted, not only to support teachers to evaluate their initiatives, but also to explore the role of leadership in developing a shared understanding of SEMWB across cluster schools. Furthermore, we suggest that future research should take place before, during, and after transition to better understand the longer-term experiences of transition and evaluate the impact of transition initiatives.

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