Tensions in AfL at the transition from primary to secondary school

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Research question

To what extent are students able to transfer, maintain and progress their AfL knowledge and skills from Year 6 in the primary school to Year 7 in the secondary school
Background

• The JAFA project of professional development in AfL for teachers in Jersey
• Small island, big vision
• 3 years of ongoing dialogue, CPD and research
• Teachers’ expansive learning (Engeström 2001)
• Classroom and school culture change
• Enabling and empowering teachers and students: changing roles
The research evidence base

• 2 primary schools and 2 ‘feeding’ secondary schools
• Interviews and discussion groups with students at the end of Yr 6, in the Autumn term and at the end of the Summer term of Yr 7
• Interviews with Yr 6 teachers, Yr 7 teachers in the autumn, AfL co-ordinators & teachers i/c transition
• Lesson observations
• Students’ work
• Documentary evidence e.g. lesson plans, meeting notes
Key questions to Yr 6 students

- Their experiences and perceptions of AfL
- How they thought they learnt
- Their expectations of secondary school
Key questions to Yr 7 students

- What and how they learnt differently at secondary school
- What they remembered from primary school about AfL techniques and how they used these in their learning at secondary school
- What they considered to be good work and work they were proud of, and reasons
- What they thought thinking and learning involved
A ‘Telling Case’: research that ‘tells’ about

• The process of transition, mainly from a students’ perspective

• The potential for transfer of AfL learning skills

• Possible inhibiting and supporting factors

• Students’ own insights into their learning (Ruddock & Flutter, 2004) privilege their accounts
Transitions

- Home to school
- R to KS1
- KS1 to KS2
- Play to more formal learning
- Informal to more formal assessment
- Dependence to independence (and then dependence?)
- Primary to secondary
- Yr 7 newness to accommodation/settledness/comfort zone etc.
Yr 6 expectations of secondary school

- ‘Higher levels’
- ‘Be more organised’
- ‘Use time more wisely’
- Being more autonomous - *Pupil 1: I am not sure if we will have to work it out for ourselves. But we should get on and do it.*
- ‘Grown-upness’
- An understanding of the more formal structure of secondary school and expectations of behaviour and time management
- Some anxiety
Yr 7 reflections in the Autumn term

• A preoccupation with ‘newness’ – teachers, subjects, movement, spaces and teacher expectations
• Time pressures
• Corridor ‘scrums’
• Claims not to remember primary school learning (but good recall when probed) - JJ: *Do you remember those things that used to go on the board? Learning intentions, success criteria. Remember them?*
  – Pupil 1: No.
  – Pupil 2: No.
  – Pupil 3: I think I have heard of it.
Yr 7 reflections in the Summer term

• The benefits of moving around, new teachers, new opportunities
• More thinking and learning - Pupil 3: And if you are in a different class all the time, then you are absorbing more of the information and if you are in the same class you are sticking with one piece all the time and not remembering anything else...and at [primary school] our work was quite boring...what we always think about the whole time was lunch, lunch, lunch, free, free...in [secondary] school time we can, we are actually moving about and it is making us think and it makes us think we are having fun and we are not thinking about breaks or lunch..
• Grown-up and independent (treated like adults)
• Better than expected relationships with their primary school peers
• Confident about self-assessment of their work
Tensions

• Yr 7 students in the Autumn anxious but enjoy secondary school

• Different perceptions of their independence - ‘Sometimes in Year 7 it is hands-up-Miss, is this what I do? And you are wanting them to become more independent. I think now, with critical skills more in primary that it is going to get better. Because with challenges and things children are having to think more. But it is sometimes quite irritating at the start of year 7. When they won’t take the risk-Miss, can you check it?’

• Different discourses and terminologies – learning intentions v. aims/objectives and personalised jargon
Students coming with learning “suitcases”; secondary teachers unaware

The ‘fresh start’ approach/need for continuity as well as new challenges - ‘...rather than repeating, the same with critical skills and things like that...we forget how much they have done at primary...and we are presuming that they don’t know anything. And they do, they are stagnating’

Secondary school teachers’ perceptions of the primary school as ‘carer’

Feedback, comments, marks, grades, levels
Student strategies

• Drawing on Critical Skills Programme e.g. challenges for learning
• Independent learning – ‘doing stuff on your own’
• Adapting and reapplying AfL techniques e.g. success criteria
• Peer support and peer teaching
• General coping strategies – lots of ‘figuring out’ - I worked one out today when the teacher was trying to teach us how to do ratios and I figured out that if I could do it at the end I would just give myself something.
Primary – Secondary transition: key issues for secondary teachers

• Auditing primary school curriculum
• Awareness of and insight into how AfL is practised at primary school and building on this
• Promoting autonomy and independent learning – ‘strategies for helping students to manage their own learning’ (Galton 1999:8)
• Stability and consistency – as well as the excitement of ‘new’ learning and progression
• Vertical and horizontal cohesion (Werlen 2006)
• And Primary colleagues’ responsibilities…
Ausblick

• Transition as an extended experience for students – how to help students bridge the gap more effectively
• Identify the successful practices (Galton ibid.)
• Building on and progressing successful practices in the primary school
• The transition from Yr 7 to Yr 8 (to which students look forward and are aware of) – will AfL skills be further used and developed or will they plateau?