

TRANSITION TEAMS PILOT

1997

KEY THEMES

What is Transition Teams?

Transition Teams is a UK developed concept that applies a teaching methodology to encourage high school students to work in teams on project areas that have been *student chosen, led, managed and designed*. The students explore options available, either in work or education, once compulsory school education has been completed. Students typically complete Transition Teams over 12 - 15 weeks, in teams of three, and are generally enrolled in either Year 9 or 10.

1997 Pilot Details

During the latter half of 1997 Transition Teams was successfully piloted by the Forum in 17 schools across 22 classes within 4 states; Tasmania, South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales. Approximately 450 students drawn from, predominantly, Years 9 & 10 experienced Transition Teams.

Feedback

Facilitators and Coordinators who piloted Transition Teams during 1997 provided written feedback to a set of questions that were primarily designed to glean an understanding as to what was required to implement Transition Teams successfully within a school. The questions encompassed the facilitator's role, marketing of the program, key lessons learnt, how Transition Teams could fit within the curriculum etc and are detailed below as headers.

Incentive to Introduce Transition Teams:

Many of the pilot schools responded that they introduced Transition Teams because they saw the program as i) an effective mechanism by which to introduce students to career opportunities or ii) a way in which to make school more meaningful for the students or finally, iii) a relatively simple, easy and cost effective way in which to introduce a model of Enterprise Education to the school.

Implementation:

In almost all instances Transition Teams was delivered within an existing subject; eg English, Work & the Community, Industry & Enterprise, Careers Education and Health. Specific class time per week was put aside for Transition Teams and the key Enterprise Skills were incorporated into class work. Most of the Transition Teams projects were formally assessed against a

subject area although a few chose not to undertake assessment against school curriculum.

The pilot programs considered that it was extremely easy to mainstream Transition Teams into the school timetable via existing curriculum. *“Within the context of delivering a specified project for a subject the task was relatively straightforward and simple. There were some problems with block release for team visits, but they were not insurmountable”.* In terms of time, on average, around 3 hours per week were dedicated to Transition Teams - this includes specified class time as well as work required outside of class time.

Most facilitators considered that their role was labour intensive. By and large this was attributed to the fact that Transition Teams was being established in Australia for the first time and it was acknowledged that the intensity of facilitation required diminished as students became more confident and comfortable with undertaking their project. A few coordinators/facilitators did note that with students who were not motivated or who were under-skilled, the required facilitation remained at an intense level.

On the whole the student teams were not formed as a result of individuals joining together to investigate a mutually interesting topic, rather friendship groupings served as the foundation for almost all the teams. The average size of the team was three.

Facilitators were able to adopt the concept of intervention on an ‘as needs’ basis, rather than instructing the students on what to do, although in some instances it was a source of frustration for facilitators.

“Our students respond to being led or told what to do, many were slow to start or needed supervision to keep on track. Staff talking and advising students about their projects; peer pressure from other students in the group helped to keep other on task and committed; and the reminder that the work was a requirement for the subject. There was also constant informal discussions and catching up with students in class or at set times”.

Others were more confident and allowed students to “initially make mistakes so that these could be recognised instead of assumed. Different students had different skill and knowledge gaps. These were discussed and suitable strategies agreed upon”.

Transition Teams ran on a 15 week cycle. In most instances the first 3 weeks were spent on introducing the Transition Teams concept, skill building and team formation and then the students had 12 weeks to complete their project. Many of the pilot schools thought that setting aside three weeks to introduce the concept and complete the necessary preparatory work was not enough and that next time they would set aside more time at the beginning and also focus more strongly on imparting the Enterprising Skills.

Generally, most facilitators recommended that Transition Teams be delivered from Term 2 through to Term 3. ie that the concept is introduced part way through Term 2 with some introductory work done and then the project starts in earnest during Term 3.

Roles

Facilitators:

From the feedback it can be seen that the role of the facilitator covered 1) promoting Transition Teams to the school and the community, 2) helping young people to generate ideas, 3) supporting project development and maintenance of groups and 4) reviewing the learning of students.

What did this involve?

1) This aspect involved the facilitator placing articles in the school and community newspapers, speaking to staff and students, preparing information for the year book, meeting with parents, writing parents introductory letters, distributing pamphlets on Transition Teams, keeping staff informed of progress and making sure students effectively communicated the concept of Transition Teams to their contacts in the employer community.

2) This was addressed by providing lists of examples and ideas of student projects, facilitating brainstorming sessions with students, involving students in mini trials of Transition Teams and using guest speakers. In some instances, however, it was more a matter of providing a little guidance to the students in an effort to make their ideas more realistic.

3) The facilitators supported project development and maintenance of student teams by asking referential questions, keeping an open door policy, emphasising the “contract” students had agreed to at the beginning of the project, mentoring, introducing log booklets to provide direction, encouraging students to make and meet project milestones, and providing review sessions.

4) Reviewing the learning of the students was carried out via various exercises; Quizzing, continuous discussions, comparisons between milestones planned and milestones reached, student articulation of positives and negatives experienced on an ongoing basis, and by helping students to self evaluate.

Resources:

Facilitators also played a role in facilitating student access to employers. This was carried out by allowing phone calls to be made by students from the office, helping students to negotiate absences from school, preparing consent forms, informing parents, providing students with a list of employers the

school already had an existing relationship with, providing internet access and encouraging students to role play prior to their visits.

Successful implementation of Transition Teams required schools to allow access by students to telephones, faxes, videos, cameras, TAFE, internet, careers centres/libraries, parents, school library, and photocopiers. (The admin staff of schools were a particularly useful resource in helping students make calls and take messages). The 1996 Transition Teams Resource Kit provided useful materials, as well as guidance, to the facilitators more so than the students. Most schools noted that the exchange of materials developed by the pilot schools throughout the Transition Teams Network was most useful and appreciated.

External facilitators were not strongly utilised. This was attributed to the difficulties and energy required in implementing a new program and a lack of understanding as to who could be approached to act as an externally based facilitator. The few examples were members from Rotary, Group Training Companies, TAFE, previous Work Experience contacts. Particularly, external employer representatives were accessed to reinforce what the Enterprising Skills were and how useful they are in the 'real' world of work/study/training.

By and large parents were a great support to those schools that were not located in easy vicinity to employers - parents were available to drive teams to and from their interviews. For quite a few pilot schools parents were kind in providing resources, such as videos and cameras, for use by students.

In the instances where the facilitators were not the Careers Adviser it was important to gain the support of the staff member who was. They acted both as a resource and a motivator for students.

Marketing:

Students were presented with the concept via brochures, talks, school newsletters, presentations and by letter.

In some cases parents were informed about Transition Teams via letters, parent evenings, newsletters or presentation at general parent nights.

School members were informed about Transition Teams through presentations to the school executive, staff meetings, bulletin notices and the school newsletter.

The Enterprising Skills:

The Enterprising Skills were delivered in a variety of ways. This involved the structured delivery of what the particular skill was or brainstorming the meaning of the skills with the students or highlighting the skills when the need arose for the students.

Training:

Feedback received reinforced the belief that training and familiarisation with the teaching methodology of Transition Teams is critical to not only the comfort level of the facilitator but also the success of the program. Even so, there were several comments made by facilitators about the reality of implementing Transition Teams and the consequent “steep learning curve”. Comments were also made by facilitators about being, initially, nervous in “letting go” with the students.

All the facilitators believe that Transition Teams could be seeded out via, at most, a one day training session so long as the Resource Kit was amended to include Australian details focussing on the Australian experience. It is believed by most of the facilitators that facilitators need support more so than training, and therefore linkages with those who have experienced implementing Transition Teams is also crucial.

Difficulties:

The main difficulties noted were - helping students to overcome a lack of motivation and organising time. The issue of students out on non supervised visits did arise in some schools - this was overcome either by enlisting the support of parents to take students on visits (without being present at the time of the interview!) or staff fulfilling that role.

Peer Review Sessions:

In some instances it was easy, due to location and release time, for facilitators to get together. However, in some states review session just did not occur. Nonetheless, all facilitators pointed out that they saw at least one mid cycle review meeting as vital because it would allow them to exchange information and more importantly to confirm within themselves how their program was going. *“It gave us an opportunity to share our triumphs and provided a supportive environment for our less than triumphs! We could review goals, expectations and achievements”*.

Project Fund:

The majority of facilitators believed that access by students to a project fund was critical as it allowed the students to plan and budget their projects and to therefore take responsibility for the projects.

Outcomes:

Facilitators listed many outcomes. For **students** there was: increased independence, development of interpersonal and group work skills, a wider understanding between education and the world of work, an opportunity to research future careers or options, gaining knowledge of their own strengths and weaknesses.

For schools there was:

an opportunity to develop an Enterprise Education model that was effective and cost efficient, provision of information for other students, a resource created that could be used by the Careers Advisers in future years, positive links made with the community, positive links made with employers and the use of different teaching methods was encouraged within the school.

In particular the impact, positive or otherwise, on **school - industry links** was hard to quantify. Many pilot schools agreed that in principle links were improved but that the program needed to be in place longer to properly assess the impact and indeed to manage the links made in a more constructive fashion.

Quite a few of the pilot schools reported back extremely positive comments as well as constructive support from the **parents**. Some schools did note that marketing to parents needed to be improved to ensure that they properly understand what type of program Transition Teams is and the potential benefits for students. That it wasn't a program where a day "wasted from school" was the only result.

Basically the pilot schools felt that Transition Teams did not have a negative effect on the **schools' resources**. Although some queries were raised about students non supervised - supervised access to equipment such as videos and computers.

Benefits:

The benefits were varied. Transition Teams made the school subject more relevant to students, allowed students to know their strengths and improve their weaknesses and had a positive influence on students' motivation, attendance, interest and confidence. Transition Teams allowed students to rely on themselves and each other and demonstrated the value of student led learning.

One of the main strengths of this concept is how it can assist careers education. The pilot schools commented that Transition Teams fitted in as a forerunner to senior school vocational based programs. It also gave students an crucial understanding of how to investigate career interests. As well students learnt how to approach individuals and organisations for assistance.

One of the perceived weaknesses of the concept of Transition Teams that had to be overcome was that bright students feared that by working in teams their performance measures would be adversely affected. Other 'weaknesses' included most pilot schools having to deal with issues such as students being partnered with students who were along for the ride or motivating students who actively resist learning in groups or, dealing with students who miss time in other subjects, or students who move on to other schools and disrupt

the team membership or that the students' interest is not always as broad as their capabilities and finally that the accuracy of the careers information passed on to fellow students may be questionable.

All the pilot schools agreed that when they were to implement Transition Teams again they would ensure that it was placed within an existing subject.

Key Lessons:

The feedback in this area indicated two main issues that would be addressed by facilitators when implementing Transition Teams again;

- the number of facilitators involved should be more than one and time should be better organised, structured and focussed,
- students were hard to motivate to present their findings once they had completed all the research and that in general motivation strategies had to be more relevant.

The issue of formally assessing the work done whilst undertaking Transition Teams also raised concerns:

Whilst the teaching methodology of Transition Teams is conducive to providing students with an attractive learning environment for a required school subject will undertaking a student chosen, led, designed and managed project that is then formally assessed remain a desirable undertaking to students?

Whilst formal assessment is one way of ensuring students remain on track and deliver how do teachers assess? (The teams work at different speeds, some members perhaps minimally)

Is the product more important than the process?

Celebration:

The students learning was rewarded by the provision of a certificate detailing the achievement of the Enterprise Skills, or a celebration, or participation in a school awards ceremony. And where the project was part of their subject they received a mark towards that subject.

Some saw the celebration as a 'coming together' of the students to reflect upon what they had learnt in a fun environment. Other pilot schools linked the celebration with existing school functions. However it was clear from the students feedback that there needed to be a distinction made between the students celebrating and reflecting on their achievements and passing information onto other students, and Transition Teams being recognised within a formal school function where the students have little or no control. Both needed to be negotiated at the outset with students, particularly when employer contacts, parents, local press, MPs and other school or community members were involved.

Advice for New Transition Teams Schools:

Apply the principles of Transition Teams to the facilitation role - do it in teams. Ensure that the necessary time required to deliver Transition Teams is timetabled in, and keep in mind that the time required diminishes through experience. Remember that in the first instance delivering Transition Teams does take time and effort.

Summary:

What was done well?

The program was marketed to students well and taken up with enthusiasm. Facilitators worked hard to main the student led and student designed integrity of the project. By and large parents and the school community were involved successfully.

What needs to be improved?

Involvement of other facilitators, primarily external people, needs to be improved.

Student involvement in negotiating their celebrations and/or presentations needs to be strengthened.

Marketing of the program to parents as a whole.

The use of reflection activities, motivation techniques for students and the introduction to students and understanding by students of the Enterprising Skills.

Strengthening the Transition Teams Network.

What was easy?

Marketing the program to students.

What was difficult?

Planning the facilitators time.

Ensuring that students could safely get to and from appointments.

Letting go and trusting the students.

Maintaining students enthusiasm once the initial research had been completed.

What was fun?

Holding the celebrations.

Seeing students thrive in their teams.

Attending peer review sessions.

Transition Teams 1997

STUDENT FEEDBACK:

More than half the students who undertook Transition Teams responded to the Student Questionnaire.

- 87% of students enjoyed doing Transition Teams.
- When asked what they most learnt from doing Transition Teams students typically responded with:

To work as a team, to communicate with others, to be independent and responsible, to be organised and to understand what options were available.

- 96% of students believed that their project was truly student led and student designed.
- However, only 55% of students believed that their Celebration Day was truly student led and student designed.

This is the most overwhelmingly negative comment that students made and in part reflects the misunderstanding by facilitators and schools as to the purpose of the Celebration Day. Transition Teams is student led, designed and managed yet in most instances they had no control over whether a celebration was held and more importantly what type of celebration was held. Rather than holding a student initiated celebration and also *negotiating* with students to participate in a mainstream school activity many students found themselves being told how they were to celebrate their achievements.

- 86% of students believed that their teacher adequately prepared them with the skills needed to do the project.
- When asked how confident students were in having gained an understanding of the Key Enterprising Skills 2% ranked themselves as (1) - *Not at all*, 3% as a (2), 33% as a (3), 43% as a (4) and 16% as a (5) - *Very*.

Its important to note that this question would have received a more pertinent response if students had to self select from 6 options rather than five. Nonetheless it is encouraging that 59% of respondents ranked themselves in the upper range.

- 93% of students would recommend Transition Teams to other students.
- 57% of students believed that Transition Teams helped them to know what they wished to do when they left school.

This was a poorly worded question. 42% replied that Transition Teams did not help them to know what they wish to do when they left school. This response does not take into account, for example, those that already knew what they wanted to do post - school and that doing Transition Teams confirmed that it was a correct choice. It also does not take into account those who found out from doing Transition Teams what it was that *they did not wish* to do post school.

- When asked if students could make any recommendations to improve the delivery of Transition Teams in the future most responded with a desire to see more examples of students who have done it before and samples of their work and many requested that more time was required to complete their projects.

Given that Transition Teams was piloted for the first time in Australia in 1997 the lack of previous project samples is understandable. Given that students felt that organisational skills was one of the main skills they got out of doing Transition Teams the response that more time is required is most interesting.

STUDENT COMMENTS:

What did you learn most from doing Transition Teams?

Being independent was probably the main thing I learnt. We couldn't ask the teacher to organise things and we had to work everything out for ourselves.

I learnt how much fun working as a team can be when all the members put in some effort.

I learnt not to rely on others, to be organised, and how easy it is to find a way around an obstacle than quit.

That I don't want to do the VET course I looked at.

Do you have any recommendations to improve the delivery of Transition Teams in the future?

Organise examples of students who have done it before and prepare a video of their project and experiences so that students get an insight into what they can achieve, set goals, and get an idea of what to do and get an idea of what they have to try and achieve.

They should get told what they are doing a few weeks before it is supposed to start so that the students have more time to think about their project subject and create a plan.

Students should be forced to take it seriously, and a proper celebration, and presentation should take place, with lots of food. We should be rewarded with all the work we did.

No, except keep doing what we did it was unreal.

I had fun doing it and I can't see how you could improve it.