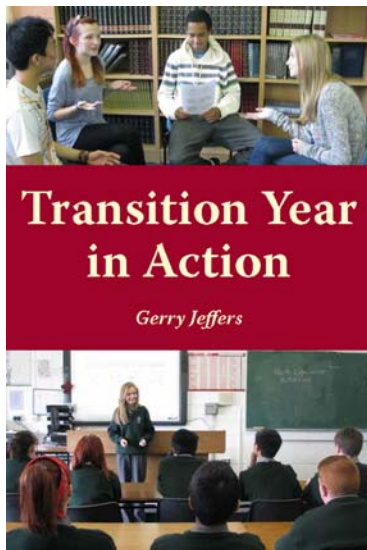


New Publication from The Liffey Press



Transition Year in Action

Gerry Jeffers

Transition Year has been one of the most innovative developments in Irish education. First introduced in a small number of schools in 1974, the programme has grown dramatically since mainstreaming in 1994. *Transition Year in Action* presents accounts of how a range of schools engage with the challenges of TY. The book illustrates some of the creativity and imagination being applied to offer teenagers educational experiences that contribute to their maturity, and demonstrates how individual teachers engage their students in active learning. The book engages with many aspects of TY programmes including work experience, mini-companies, community service, fundraising activities, musicals and learning beyond the classroom as well as TY-specific modules, sampling modules and 'linear' or 'continuity' subjects. *Transition Year in Action* also explores aspects of co-ordination, resources, school leadership and research.

Through the voices of students, parents, teachers, co-ordinators, principals and researchers, *Transition Year in Action* provides a nuanced picture of the breadth and complexity of Transition Year as it sits uncomfortably between Junior Cycle and the demands of the Leaving Certificate. The book will offer inspiration as well as practice guidance to anyone interested in making the Transition Year vision a reality, whether they are approaching the programme for the first time or seeking to refresh and sustain established programmes.

About the Author

Gerry Jeffers is an educational researcher and lecturer. He worked in the Education Department at NUI Maynooth (now Maynooth University) for 12 years. Prior to that Gerry was national co-ordinator of the Transition Year Curriculum Support Service.

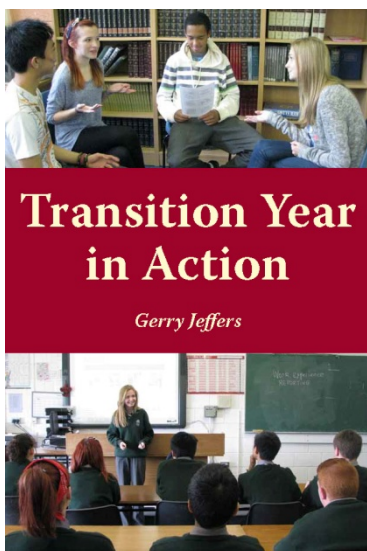
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TY is an idealistic project. From the outset it has been a fragile plant in the educational garden. It lives in continual danger of being colonised by more pragmatic values and impulses. At the same time, the TY story is one of a bright idea that, despite a hesitant start, has taken root in the system. (Introduction)

‘TY is a great space for enabling young people discover their interests, possibilities and passions.....It’s important to keep the programme fresh so we encourage teachers to innovate. Every year we try to add something new. We keep an eye on balancing academic and other initiatives,’ *Linda Dunne, Principal, Coláiste Bhride, Carnew, Co. Wicklow* (Chapter 2)



‘We also found that there is great variation in TY. So, in a town you might have one school here and down the road another school and two totally different TYs. It seems that, depending on what school you went to, or even which TY co-ordinator you had, dictated what kind of TY experience you got. It’s more inequality in education; what happens in TY has a massive effect on the next two years, even the rest of your life.’ *Craig McHugh, Former President, Irish Second-level Students Union (ISSU).* (Chapter 1)

‘Young people learn so much through mini-companies, from group dynamics to how enterprise works in practice. Mini-companies are great for building confidence, especially when students attend trade fairs and have to present themselves, be interviewed, answer questions about their product or service, in short, to really communicate.’ *Tara O’Loughlin, Teacher, St Caimán’s Community School, Shannon, Co.Clare* (Chapter 3)

‘Community Care changes you. To be honest, beforehand I was wondering will I get paid. By the second day I didn’t care about getting paid because I just wanted to talk to these guys. I’d like to meet and talk with them every week, to work there and to care for them. I just forgot about the money.’ *Jan, TY student, Firhouse Community College, Dublin,* (Chapter 4)

‘While many Transition Year co-ordinators and guidance counsellors were committed to the benefits of work experience and understood the complexity of appropriate preparation at all levels – teachers, students, parents, employers – we found that classroom teachers at times had not, or could not, imagine how they might connect the learning that happened in the classroom (by them or by their students) with what happened on a work experience placement’. *Annelies Kamp, Researcher, Dublin City University* (Chapter 5)

'The recognition of TY programmes by parents over the last number of years has grown immensely. Parents now appreciate that TY helps students to develop and prepare them for the ever modernising world and that the experience and knowledge gained through this will stand positively in their favour.' *Don Myers, President, National Parents' Council, Post-primary* (Chapter 6)



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'Even though its success depends on enormous additional commitment by teachers, the show (musical) in TY leads to great experiences of excellence, immeasurable personal growth and a host of magnificent memories,' *Michelle Sliney, Principal, Coláiste Choilm, Ballincollig, Co Cork* (Chapter 7)

'In a school you can put on cards, bingo, pool, darts and so on for older people but we are learning what they love most is a get together and a sing song. Schools are ideal locations because they are at the centre of most communities, they are accessible for those with limited mobility and there are plenty of enthusiastic young people who want to entertain.' *Dermot Kirwan, Friends of the Elderly, Dublin.*(Chapter 8)

'We are not looking so much at the content, the information in their portfolios, as at their ability to present, to communicate, we are looking at their self-esteem and their confidence, their ability to reflect, to analyse, to self-critique, to apply what they have learned to different scenarios.' *Jacqui O'Reilly-Dillon, Principal, Magh Éne College, Bundoran, Co Donegal.* (Chapter 10)

Perhaps one of the long-term legacies of the mainstreaming of TY is that it has generated, and sustains, debate among students, parents, teachers, school leaders, policy makers and the wider society about the purposes of schooling. (Chapter 13)

'We know an awful lot of good stuff that happens in TY is not measureable until a lot later in life. I think that is a huge difficulty' *Glenda Groome, TY Co-ordinator, Cross and Passion College, Kilcullen, Co Kildare* (Chapter 14)

'I think as teachers we sometimes underestimate how dominated our work is by the exam system. That's TY's great strength, the liberation from a terminal exam' *Gearoidín O'Dwyer, Teacher, Newpark Comprehensive School, Dublin* (Chapter 17)

'The once-off events and the TY-specific modules often get a high profile – work experience, outdoor pursuits, mini-company, the musical, trips, visiting speakers and so on, but the sampling and continuity subjects are also vital. Being creative with them can be more challenging.' *Michael O'Leary, former National TY Co-Ordinator, PDST* (Chapter 15)

'I'm also very conscious of the value of active methodologies, of experiential learning. So, through discussions, co-operative teams, making presentations, preparing for and participating in exhibitions, the students learn and practice social competence,' *Fergal Murphy, Teacher, St Leo's College, Carlow* (Chapter 23)

'From my experience interacting with teachers of TY mathematics, teaching the subject at third level and promoting mathematics at second-level and with the general public, I have seen the power of stories. On many occasions I have witnessed how short stories from the history of mathematics change students' perception of mathematics for the better.' *Fiacre O Caibre, Lecturer, Maynooth University* (Chapter 24)

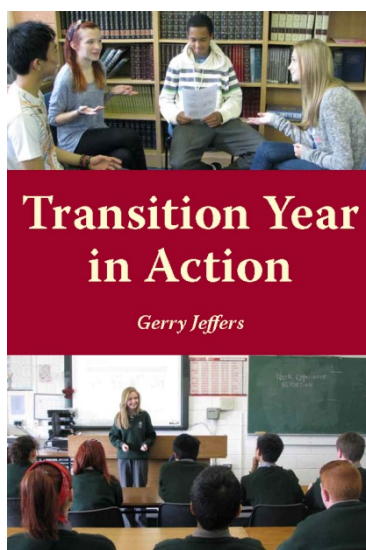
'As I see it, underneath the exterior of a teenager lies a kind, empathic and congruent person who really wants to bring about a change in society and make the world a better place. Unlike adults, most teenagers are not cynical, so for me they are and will always be a breath of fresh air,' *Lori Fields, Teacher, Manor House School, Dublin* (Chapter 25)

'Make the programme challenging and fun. Try to engage with people from the "real world" that is, the world of work. Students need as much exposure as possible to what they will experience once they leave school..... Finally, trust students. Ask them what they think of the work they are doing. Listen to their responses. Change what is not working for them and for you. Become a facilitator of their learning.' *Máire O'Higgins, Partnerships Co-ordinator, Larkin Community College, Dublin.* (Chapter 27)

'Initially I struggled to make the subject interesting, Many would conceal their insecurities about their art by being dismissive about their work, giving up quickly, acting up in class. I realised lessons needed to be more appealing/engaging. Partly by trial and error, I found that they responded well to cartooning, to gaming and to creating with Lego. I integrated all these into my modules. The result was a lot of excitement, attention and engagement from almost all students,' *Nicola Lee, Teacher, De La Salle College, Waterford.* (Chapter 26)

(Outdoor pursuits) 'brings together in practice so many ideas that are key to TY..... the fact that the learning is away from conventional classrooms, that it is learning by doing, that it involves teamwork where without the co-operation of others you will fail, where you have to face your own fears, where strong personal bonds are built.' *Mary Doherty, TY Co-ordinator, St Joseph's Mercy Secondary School, Navan, Co.Meath* (Chapter 29)

' I think TY works well when it is seen as a space where teachers can apply co-operative and creative active methodologies to enrich young people's learning. I would like to see the leaders in the system showing more awareness of the dynamics needed to create school cultures that make this possible. Teachers need a lot more time to talk to each other about their practices.' *Cornelius Young, Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)* (Chapter 30)



A fear is that, despite claims of TY being 'embedded' (DES, 2004) in the system, it remains a sort of parallel universe, its own bubble, cut off from the harsher realities of the competitive individualism associated with LC grades and 'points', admission to higher education and schools' rankings on so-called 'league tables'. (Conclusion)