Transitions: A Discussion Paper

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Introduction

> *In music a transition moves from one key into another and takes one of two forms: a sudden shift in one moment in time which is dramatic and perhaps even startling or a series of changes that gradually moves the music through a number of progressions to achieve over a longer period a transition that is of the same order but staged and characterised by subtlety and connection. This latter transition is more often referred to as a modulation.*

The old shibboleth about forgetting history would encourage us to consider in this paper the nature and scale of changes that have happened over time and the lessons to be learnt from those changes. Nostalgia was once described as history without the pain and there is in no sense an intention to argue for a return to past practices, but it will be a theme that there are lessons and principles from those past practices that might usefully be brought into play in any revision of transitions in New Zealand education.

Joining the dots

A further framework within which to start is the view that there are three key transition points which are markers of a successful transit through education systems:

- two years of quality early childhood education (understood to be two years of 15 hours a week in a programme with qualified teachers);

- successfully achieving high school graduation (which in New Zealand in increasingly seen and perhaps even officially sanctioned as NCEA Level 2:

- gaining a postsecondary qualification. A high school graduation qualification is necessary but no longer sufficient for moving toward a family sustaining wage (Hooker and Brand, 2009)

Students who have successfully completed each of these points are generally considered to be self-sustaining learners who have life options before them and who will not be unduly represented in the negative statistics of youth justice, incarceration, unemployment and social welfare. What is more, they have a potential to earn more (Scott 2009) which is good for them, their families, the community and the country (Earle 2010). But where these transitions are disrupted by poor performance and do not proceed in a seamless manner, students have fewer and lower successful outcomes (Loader and Dalgety 2008). This paper is concerned with transitions at the second and third of these critical transition points.

This paper is also particularly concerned with priority learners – those young people who do not proceed smoothly through the education system and on to employment. This group is comprised of a cross section of young people but Māori and Pasifika are disproportionately represented in it. A recent paper prepared by Ako Aotearo describes this group in these terms:

The 'priority learners' group – primarily those learners at NZQF levels 1-3 – is the largest single group of learners in New Zealand's tertiary education system. Although the number of enrolments in this group has declined since its 2005 high point, in 2009 these learners still made up 36% of all tertiary enrolments. However, many of these priority learners are enrolled in part-time programmes – from 2002-2009 an annual average of 61% of these learners were enrolled on a part-time basis, and the average learner was enrolled as 0.35 EFTS (the lowest of any level).

Māori have comparatively high rates of participation at levels 1-3, and this is a key reason for the overall high rates of participation by Māori in tertiary education throughout the 2000s. In 2009, the 'age-standardised' participation rate for Māori at levels 1-3 was 8.7%, compared to 4.9% for Pasifika, 3.7% for New Zealand European, 3.3% for domestic asian learners, and 4.4% overall.

One of the most distinctive features of students at levels 1-3 is their age profile – specifically the comparatively high proportion of learners who are aged 40+. In 2009, 38% of level 1-3 learners fell into this age group, compared to approximately 30% for learners at other sub-degree and postgraduate levels, and 12% for those at degree-level.

Level 1-3 learners are primarily (63% in 2009) located within the ITP sector, with smaller concentrations located in PTEs and Wānanga (21% and 18% respectively) and only a very small presence (2%) in universities.

(Ako Aotearoa 2011)

Traditional Transitions

Education systems demand of students that they make a number of transitions during their time in education and training. Historically this was simple in structure.

Figure 1   **Traditional Transitions**
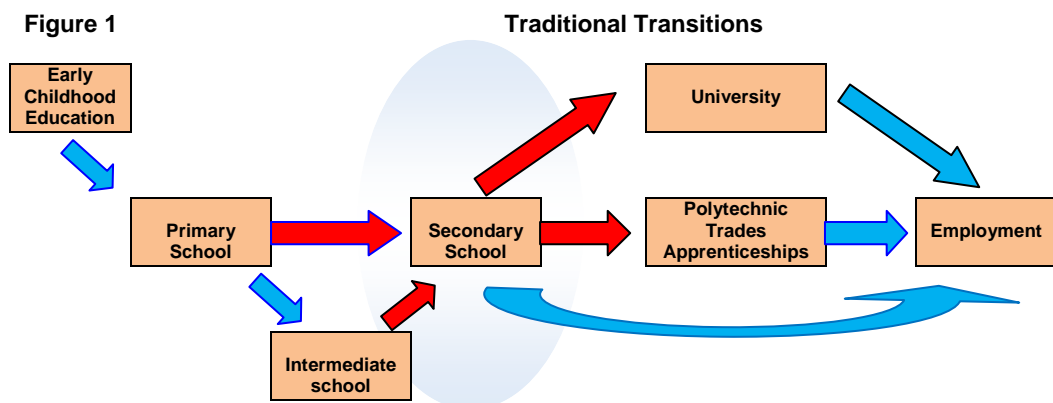
This series of transitions took students through early childhood education and primary school (which for some included the additional step of intermediate school) into secondary education, which until the 1970's had the binary outcomes of university study or employment and the training associated with it. Training on the 'employment' pathway would be predominantly located in the workplace supplemented by night classes and other training opportunities such as block courses in technical high schools, which were later to be the core on which the polytechnic system developed. During the 1960s and especially in the 1970s, these polytechnics increasing took over the role of training for employment.

Studies (see for example Ministry of Education 2004, Ussher 2006) show clearly that students who proceed directly to further education and training are clearly more likely to complete the postsecondary programme they into go into at both ITPs and universities. Further, this group is more likely to proceed to a qualification at a level higher than the one they started immediately on leaving school. An uninterrupted transition from school to further education and study is a strong transition, but there is a social class element to this process,

with students from lower socio-economic backgrounds tending to not fully capitalise on their previous qualifications (Tieben and Wolbers 2010). Perhaps as many as 60% of secondary students successfully make this transition from secondary school to university, school to polytechnic and others such as school to employment or school to education and training with a range of other organisations such as wānanga and private training providers.

A follow-up study (Dalgety and Loader 2008) confirmed this and attributed the overall increase in school leavers' making this transition to postsecondary education and training to significant increases in students entering lower level programmes.

New Zealand's history of universal secondary education is relatively short. McKenzie *et al*'s (1990) account of the development of the technical high school in New Zealand draws attention to the academic tradition of the New Zealand secondary school and the perpetual drift towards an emphasis on an academic curriculum when changes were mooted such as reforms to make room for technical and vocational education (*Ibid*). It would not be until after the Second World War that New Zealand would introduce a range of initiatives for technical and vocational education – apprenticeship training was regularised, technical high schools and the vocational curriculum were strengthened and so on. But eventually the notion of the common comprehensive high school prevailed. And what McKenzie *et al.* call the "demise" (p.42) of the technical high school was accomplished within a policy setting that emphasised universal secondary education.

Until the mid-1970s, students stayed in secondary schools for between two and three years on average (Middleton 2010), but during a period of 20 years, the numbers staying in secondary school increased from 12% to 62%. It was during this period of time that disengagement from education as a phenomenon appeared not only in New Zealand (Middleton 2008), but also in Canada (Tilleczek 2008), Australia (Hinde 1999), and Great Britain (Cassidy 2005, Watson 2005), and escalated in the United States of America (Venezia *et al.* 2003).

This meant that students were staying in secondary school for longer periods of time and a more sophisticated set of transitions developed which introduced a complexity into the lives of secondary school students and less connection between the ostensible goals of some schools subjects (such as the clearly vocational subjects such as technical drawing, engineering workshop, commercial practice and so on) and the world of work.

Due to a variety of factors, opportunities were stripped from the system during a period of time during which New Zealand was subjected to the most radical and comprehensive reforms in its educational history. The social policies established by the first Labour Government were fundamentally maintained for almost fifty years, until the fourth Labour Government saw its election in 1984 and re-election in 1987 as an overwhelming mandate to pursue change.

Students able to leave school at the age of sixteen were increasingly denied a pathway for doing so and staying in school for a longer period became an expectation. In addition to the growing view that more education would result in better educated young people, the factors below played a part in contributing to the situation in which less choice prevailed.

- Unemployment was hard-wired into the economy and rather than the option of leaving work at fifteen and being able to secure employment there simply were no jobs available at this end of the youth labour market for these inexperienced and youthful aspiring workers – staying at school and/or disengaging became the options.

- A range of factors placed demands on business which led to a decline in on-the-job training (Green *et al.* 2003), and the track of the novice / experienced hand leading to

night class and on into technical qualifications atrophied over time, removing what had been an important transition for youths who had struggled at school.

- Exit points decreased over time as the focus on higher qualifications continued the creeping credentialism that goes with over supply of labour and which had steadily increased in impact over the previous thirty years.

- The 'Night School', an institution located in the technical high schools, became increasingly recreational as the technical and vocational courses were progressively shifted into the polytechnic sector creating a conflict between earning and learning. At the same time a growing renewed emphasis on workplace training emerged. Where once daylight had been devoted to earning and darkness brought the learning opportunities, both now competed for daylight time.

- The number of apprenticeships available to young students decreased as a reflection of the withdrawal of the government as an employer. A substantial number of New Zealand's apprenticeships were with government organisations such as the Post Office, the Electricity Department, the Railways Department, the Public Works Department and the armed services, which saw trades training as a key role.

- Targeted schemes such as the Māori Trades Training Scheme gradually withered as government appetite for such approaches declined.

- The impact of technology, while easy to overstate, was marked in areas of employment such as office work, business administration and financial services which had been a key direction in which many early school leavers found employment. While young school leavers might have been well-equipped for these technology-rich areas, the number of positions was contracting.

These impacts took place in the context of major changes in the international youth labour market as western economies re-shaped themselves for a variety of reasons. There might also have been an impact from the sequence of events after World War II which conspired to add yet another dimension to the nature of school leaving patterns. To address a shortage of labour and to compensate for the aspirations of returning service personnel, western countries turned to immigration to meet demands for unskilled and low skilled workers blocking off yet another avenue for those not succeeding at school. It is also possible that a shift in values accompanied this trend in which the value of "being employed" became replaced by one which emphasised "which job you had". Where once low skilled and unskilled education had been the blotting paper for educational failure or disenchantment or the financial demands of the home, various tracks into employment were being systematically closed down.

Slowly and perhaps by default, a seeming commitment to universal tertiary education was being added to that of universal primary education, which was now clearly achieved, and universal secondary education, which seemed to be close at being achieved. But as the new goal seemed to be getting closer, the goal of universal secondary education was starting to be eroded by the emergence of secondary disengagement as a phenomenon. Educational failure, once masked by a range of opportunities for young people, now became explicit and a threat to the personal well-being of the individual.

The education systems of New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Great Britain and the United States of America share a characteristic which sees a disengaging group (perhaps as many as 20% of each cohort) leave the education system. In the United States this group has been referred to as 'drop-outs', but the complexity of the phenomenon, systemic and

structural features of education systems and characteristics of the disengaging group each deserve a more sophisticated analysis while the reality remains that these students do indeed drop out of the system (Tyler and Lofstrom 2009, Schwarz 2011). Middleton (2008) has generalised this phenomenon into three identifiable types of disengagement: *physical*, *virtual,* and *unintended.*

Physical Disengagement involves students, as the term implies, physically not being at school. This can follow a pattern of incremental increases in truancy (,[1] be triggered by a specific episode such as exclusion (there are around 1500 exclusion and expulsions each year (Phillips 2007)), or be the result of increasing alienation from the business of being at school and all that implies. The phenomenon is not entirely new. For instance there is an historical pattern of disengagement of Māori students as shown in Figure 3, a trend that defies the increasing proportion of Māori students in the education system.

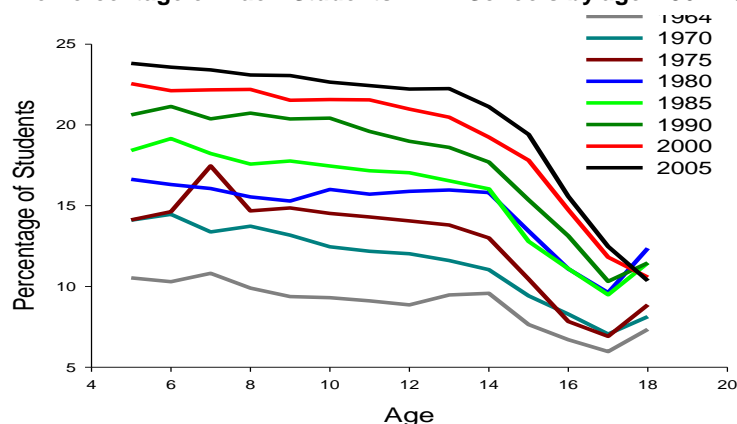**Figure 2   The Percentage of Maori Students in NZ Schools by age 1964-2005**

Figure 3. The percentage of Maori students in NZ schools by age: 1964-2005.

This group simply is not at school to manage conventional transitions directly from secondary to tertiary education.

Virtual Disengagement occurs when a student attends school regularly, is generally compliant, no particular trouble to teach and might even be enjoying the experience offered – especially outside the traditional classroom in activities such as sport, music and cultural engagement. However, the student's disengagement instead occurs within classrooms where programmes have little impact, leading to a net result of low levels of qualifications gained and poor academic preparation for further education and training. The stark contrast of the high levels of persistence of Pasifika students in New Zealand schools with the low levels of achievement and qualifications of Pasifika students as a group is the result of virtual disengagement.

Finally, unintended disengagement is a reflection of random course selection based on factors other than the importance and relevance of particular courses for a future pathway. This leads to inconsistent results which lack integrity and coherence, and do not provide a platform from which to successfully make the transition into postsecondary education and training. The *Starpath* Project[2] is highlighting these factors.

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[1] Truancy rates rise from 2.5% in Year 9 to 5% in Year 13 with 30,000 New Zealand secondary students from school each day (Ministry of Education 2011).

[2] The Starpath project, University of Auckland, is a major study of of issues and factors which are behind the failure of underserved groups in education and especially at the point of transition from secondary school to further education and training with an emphasis on the transition to university.

These patterns have seen the rise of the 'NEET' (Not in Employment, Education, or Training) group which is now accorded statistical significance in the reporting of labour market statistics and social welfare discussions. The NEET group is made up of 15 to 19 year old young people who are not in employment, education or training. They number between 17,000 and 25,000 (the number fluctuates a little as seasonal employment impacts on the size of this statistical group) and estimates place the cost of this group at around $1 billion each year.[3] This group is the accumulation of youth disengaged from education, and pathways back into the education system for this group are difficult.

Supplementary programmes: In place for some time

In response to the pressure on the conventional secondary school curriculum, a number of supplementary programmes have been developed to aid transition from secondary school into further education and training. Figure 4 below maps programmes which were designed to provide enhanced transitions for students moving from the senior secondary school into postsecondary education and training and/or into employment and workplace training.

It should be noted that increasingly groups of students made transitions out of the mainstream of education and therefore had no access to these supplementary programmes. There is a group of students, estimated by Chief Family Court Judge Becroft to be around 4,500 in number, that fail to appear in a secondary school having left a primary school. A group of students is moved into 'Alternative Education' due to a lack of fit or discipline and less often social issues within the mainstream. As has been noted above, further groups are those excluded and those who disengage.
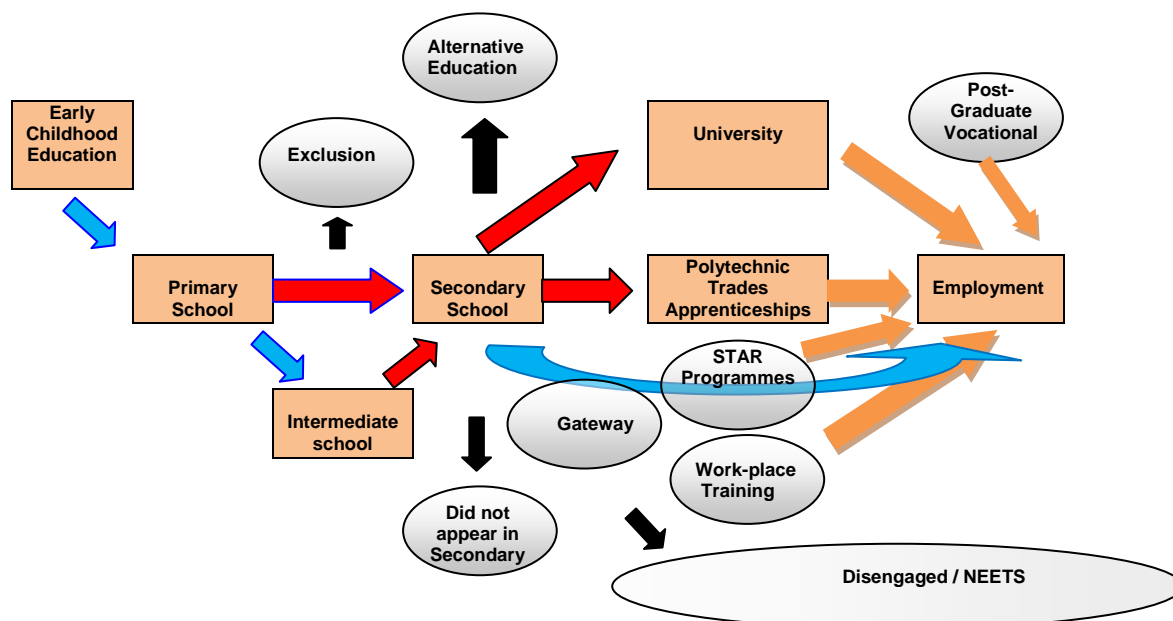

Figure 3   **Increasing complexity in the supplementary programmes offered**

Gateway

Gateway is a programme of structured learning experiences in the workplace undertaken by a student while still at school. It is formally planned, organised and agreed between the school and the industry. This enhanced work experience programme enables students to

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[3] This estimate is derived from economic impact reports from other countries (see Alliance for Excellent Education 2007, iNACOL 2009) which take into account a range of factors that include social, justice, welfare and similar dimensions. There also exists a small number of New Zealand studies such as the PWC COMET Report (Middleton, 2009).

make transitions from school into either further workplace learning or into, Career and Technical Education (CTE) with a basis for their decisions informed by their experiences. It is reported that in 2005, a total of 5,630 students participated in Gateway. The complexities of this programme are evident in a handbook (Teriary Education Commission 2010) developed to assist in the delivery of this programme.

STAR Programmes

The Ministry of Education describes the STAR Programme as:

> *The Secondary Tertiary Alignment Resource (STAR) delivers additional funds to all State secondary schools with year 11-13 students. STAR assists boards of trustees, principals and schools to better meet the needs of students. It enables schools to help their students smoothly transition from school to further education and/or employment. There is a focus on at-risk students intending to go straight into the workforce.* (Ministry of Education 2011)

Typically this resource is used to provide short taster-type courses at polytechnics or to fund more substantial interface programmes. There is great flexibility in its use. It is reported that in 2005, 17,000 students undertook courses at tertiary education providers, funded through the STAR programme. The conclusions of a review of STAR)pointed to a range of issues and resource anomalies that this programme raised (Vaughan and Kenneally 2003).

Workplace Training: Modern Apprenticeships

Workplace training takes many forms from the informal novice/master relationship through to formalised programmes – the most substantial of which are those delivered through New Zealand's industry training system.

Modern apprenticeships are a subset of industry training intended to provide a supported transition from school to work. It was introduced and targeted at young people as a counter to the prevailing practices of employers who favoured older workers who could prove service rather than offer only potential (Mahoney 2009)This scheme sought to return to the practice of offering apprenticeships to school leavers and younger people.

A feature of this scheme is that it provides through the role of co-ordinators, support and guidance appropriate to its targeted group of 16- 21 year olds. The performance of young people in this scheme is variable depending on the particular industry, the quantum of learning, the previous qualification of the learner, ethnicity, and location among other things. Success and failure in a modern apprenticeship is complex. Completion rates vary from industry to industry, but are generallybetween 30% - 40% over 5-6 years (Mahoney 2009).

A new paradigm for transitions: Modulated transition rather than abrupt transition

Picking up the musical allusion to transition and modulation at the start of this paper, this paper proposes that the notion of a transition in education should become more characterised by 'modulation' from one education state – being a secondary school student – to another, which might be a university student, a polytechnic student, an apprentice and so on. In this case, a transition would be thought of more as a transitional *zone* in which a student made changes to their pattern of learning, where the place or places at which this learning took place altered, in which the educational focus shifted from the general to the specific, and through which the overarching purpose shifted from that of general improvement through the gaining of knowledge and skills to the specific knowledge and skills that would be required for the next steps on the pathway the student has chosen.

This would happen over a period of time within the students' lives rather than being a sudden transition that took place over a Christmas holiday.

The notion of the transitional zone could also be a mechanism to address the issue of improving the performance of students who do not currently manage either the preparation required for a successful transit or even the transition itself to further education and training at higher levels.

Multiple pathways

The original paradigm for education pathways was historically and fundamentally based on one way of education; the academic way. This was adjusted to allow for a second way to co-exist through the growth of vocational and technical education. But it was essentially a binary distinction and the two were seen as separate tracks down which students would proceed. Even when secondary schools had a greater focus on vocational and technical education than they currently do have, there was clear separation and delineation between 'academic' on the one hand and 'technical' and 'commercial' on the other.

This new way of working would require schools to become both academic and vocational in which secondary and postsecondary education and training would be closely integrated – especially in Years 11-13 – and there would be a greater emphasis on practical / applied education both alongside and within the conventional academic programmes. It would also require teachers from different sectors to work together.

A recent book entitled *The Death of the Comprehensive High School?* (Franklin and McCulloch 2007) poses the question of the extent to which existing models of secondary schooling can be expected to cater for the range of students that now enter schools' gates to receive an education that prepares them for the world to follow. The collection of essays typifies the issues as international and urgent. These issues are variously described but can generally be grouped under the following headings (O'Connell 2010):
- high school graduation / leaving requirements;
- rigorous and relevant coursework;
- poor preparation for higher education;
- poor preparation for careers;
- persistent gaps in achievement.

A further analysis (Oakes and Saunders 2008) strikes a grim note.

> *Evidence abounds that high schools simply don't work very well: Witness strikingly high drop-out rates, large percentages of graduates unprepared to succeed in college or career, education gaps that jeopardize African American and Latina students' life chances, and widespread student disengagement.* (p3)

Oakes and Saunders go on to describe secondary education in the United States as being in a state of *pervasive dysfunction.* But rather than pursue the old binary argument between an 'academic' or a 'vocational' secondary education, they report on what some call a third way, or multiple pathways – an approach whose "advocates seeks to move beyond what they see as a tired debate between academic and vocational education and the traditional tracking of students into different high school courses" (Oakes and Saunders 2008).

Much of this approach has its origins in a strand of thinking that has been much discussed but much less acted upon over the past several decades. In the United States, various reform movements such as the standards-based reforms, network-based reforms and the market approach reforms (Schwarz 2003) have proposed a reform strategy that closely resembles the current multiple pathways approach, and over the following five years the term became centre stage in a number of major reports (e.g. Schwarz 2011). The major refocus on Career and Technical Education was also premised on the multiple pathways approach.

Wyn *et al.* (2010) support calls for the implementation of more flexible pathways but also raise cautions about the limitations of the metaphor of the pathway – they see a risk of the flexibility and complexity of pathways being masked by the suggestion of a linear approach in the word "pathway". Having noted that, there is some agreement as to the characteristics of quality pathways and provision. The following table shows the connections between various analyses.

Component	California Dept of Education (2008)	Oakes and Saunders (2008)	Tertiary High School (Middleton 2008)	Early College High School (Hoffman 2004)	The 3rd Way (Atkinson and al. 2010)
Curriculum	An integrated core curriculum	A college preparatory core	Integrated curriculum based on the NZ Curriculum	Integrated standards-based academic content and technical content	CTE as a part of all students' high school ecperience
Career and Technical Education	An integrated career technical core curriculum	A professional or technical core grounded in real-world standards	Base of preparing for trades and careers leading to CTE programmes	Broad-based CTE offerings introducing students to wide career options	Produce life-long learners academically skilled and career- ready
Activity outside the school	A series of work-based-learning opportunities	Field based learning, realistic workplace simulations	Retain links with previous school, personal development opportunities	Work-based learning and experiences	
Support	Student support services	Additional student support	Significant additional student support		
Professional development	PD to give career and technical educators the tool to integrate curriculum		High school teachers working with CTE teachers		
High School / tertiary Links			Complete integration of high school and tertiary programmes		Business leaders linked with educators
Other features		Promote students entrepreneurialism to aid career interests		Link secondary with post-secondary	Work within existing structures

The common features that come through many analyses are that a "multiple pathways" approach is likely to be:

- programmes that are both academic and vocational/technical;
- have high levels of flexibility;
- a close integration of high school and post-secondary level study;
- an opportunity to experience practical / applied education as well as the more conventionally academic programmes;
- teachers from different sectors working alongside each other.

But all this is moulded into pathways that are flexible (Schwarz 2003). In some respects these ideas are not new to New Zealand, inasmuch as there have been discussions about the dysfunctional nature of the boundaries between sectors and programmes and the incremental move of schooling away from employment. But there has been no subsequent commitment to the changes implied in such discussions. Copper (1986) raised the issues related to the provision of a range of proposed or actual provisions that constituted a recognition that the standard menu of offerings in schools was not catering for the needs of

all students. The developments, especially the reforms, were a possible route through which, in Copper's view, schools could *"respond more readily to what the community wants, especially in the upper secondary school. If schools do not respond to the opportunities and challenges implicit in this, then I believe that we will see a flight of post-compulsory students to other educational institutions and the reduction of all but the most academic schools to virtual junior high schools."*

His message, twenty-five years ago, was abundantly clear in that paper: the senior secondary school was not meeting the needs of all students. This issue is the one still faced today. But today alternatives to the conventional secondary school are appearing and schools are faced with issues (essentially those outlined by Copper in 1986) that arise from the need for schools to be flexible, to work with others and to see resources in terms of a student rather than an institutional entitlement. The Youth Guarantee policy setting (see below) and the options coming out of it are very much a response to this issue.

Capper returned to the topic in a further paper (Schwarz 2011) this time describing the issue as *"questioning the continued validity of regarding the secondary service as a fixed and discrete entity"* and a blurring of the boundaries between secondary education and other sectors which posed a challenge at that time to the policies being pursued by the teachers' organisation.

In the early 1990s the notion of seamless education was a vision of a system *"under which it no longer matters with which provider or in which educational programme students are studying. All learning will lead to qualifications within the same framework"* (Ministry of Education 1993)/ The National Qualifications Framework and the new school curriculum were in their early stages of development or implementation. The ideas were expanded with suggestions:

- that students would *be able to undertake education and training in more than one setting at the same time";*
- that senior secondary school students might be able to *"combine regular school courses with polytechnic or university courses and workplace training provided by local industries";*
- institutions could enter into agreements with each other;
- schools would have the *"opportunity to offer courses which have previously been available only at polytechnics or universities";*
- *"Industry training organisations will be able to develop training programmes both on and off the job to meet their industries' future needs.*

Seventeen years ago these ideas were being proposed and there has been some movement towards their realization with perhaps greatest progress being in the industry training area with developments such as the recently announced vocational pathways. Critical reforms such as minimizing a "time served" approach to gaining qualifications and it was only in 2010 that students wishing to leave school to pursue a different form of education and training could do so within constraints without financial penalty.

Successive governments have recognized the current need for addressing inflexible boundaries between secondary schooling and post secondary education and training. The last Labour-led Government, through its *Schools Plus* policy (Ministry of Education 2008) and the current National-led Government with the developing package of initiatives under the umbrella of Youth Guarantee (Ministry of Education 2011) have a political will to address the issues outlined in this paper and new opportunities are emerging. For instance:

- *"Youth Guarantee"* permits a student to enter postsecondary education and training from the end of Year 11 to engage in programmes at the lower end (Levels 1-3) without the requirement for tertiary fees. Numbers of capped and currently stand at 7,000 places each year.
- *"Trades and Services Academies"* are being developed. Taking the form of a programme in a secondary school, they are intended to have a special flavor around a particular trade area or, in the case of the service academy, a more structured and formal discipline along the lines of a services cadet group.
- *Legislative changes* have been made (Education Amendment Act 2010) to allow forthe attendance of an under 16 years of age student in an education or training setting other than a secondary school. By providing for a full and genuine dual enrolment and the discharging of the duty of care conventionally directed at the school board, it makes possible funding from both secondary and tertiary sources to be directed towards the student and allows for flexible use of that funding. In short, these changes remove legal impediments to a more flexible transition from secondary into tertiary and allow for greatly increased shared involvement between secondary schools and postsecondary providers.
- Special initiatives aimed at giving a new shape to the secondary – postsecondary transition are starting to emerge. For instance:

  - Te Wānanga o Aotearoa has established a similar programme, Te Wai Wānanga, at Palmerston North which combines secondary and tertiary objectives with a focus on sports.
  - Weltec (Wellington) and CPIT (Christchurch) have established a trades school tasking in Year 12 students and supplementing their trades study and activity with supplemental instruction in basic skill areas.
  - A Tertiary High School has been established at Manukau Institute of Technology which takes students from a targeted group identified by school / parents as likely to disengage. At the end of Year 10 they remain enrolled in both their school and at the polytechnic to undertake a programme that synthesises the NCEA requirements and study towards a two year trades qualification.

The Tertiary High School at Manukau Institute of Technology has been described (Middleton, 2010) as not taking students out of school, but keeping them in school although they will not be at school. That combined with multilevel study, synchronous study at both secondary and tertiary levels, simultaneously working towards "secondary" and "tertiary" qualifications are all possible in such a setting. It is this notion of a porous boundary that typifies a move towards a better modulated transition as the way of the future rather than the hard transition points that have developed. Or, put another way, a softer zone of transition would be developed which allows a student to prepare through both programming and through experiences for the transition that is ahead. A transition could then be seen not as one moment in time but a set of curriculum focus points, of experiences and of mixed level study that eases a student into the next phase of their educational life.

There has been an emphasis in this paper on school leavers – quite simply they are a good investment. Those with robust academic preparation manage a seamless transition into postsecondary education and training. School leavers are more likely to complete qualifications than students who had been in the work force previous to their entry into tertiary study. That school leavers were more likely to be full-time students and studying in intramural programmes has a positive impact on their success. The extent to which they are more successful is marked: they are twice as likely to complete a bachelors degree at university, clearly more likely to complete a Level 1-3 qualification at an ITP and more likely at both providers to progress to and complete a higher qualification (Ussher 2006).

This applies too to those with less adequate academic preparation for postsecondary education and training. Of the 7,409 students who left school in 2005 with less that 14 credits in NCEA and students with some NCEA success (but less than University Entrance), 40% continued their education in tertiary institutions. This group includes a disproportionate number of Māori and Pasifika students. But overall Māori and Pasifika students have much the same rates of progression to tertiary study as other students in their attainment group, bearing in mind that their presence diminishes in progressively higher attainment groups. However, 75% of all school leavers participate in tertiary education within five years of leaving school (Dalgety and Loader 2008).

Blurring Entry and Exit
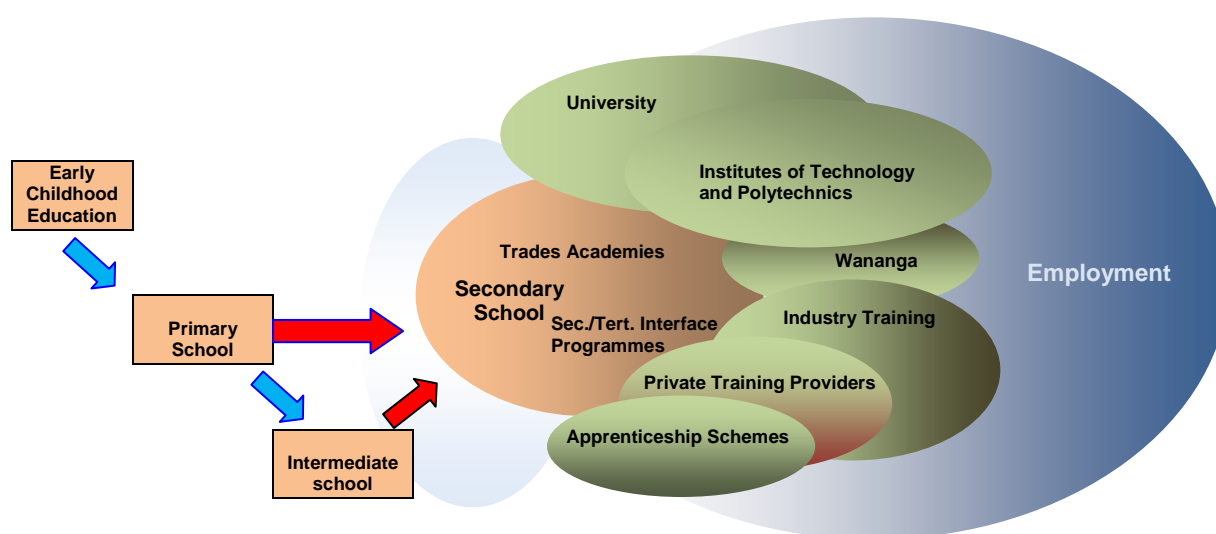
Transitions, whether they be abrupt or modulated require response not only with regard to preparing students for the exit from school but also for the introduction, induction and socialisation into postsecondary programmes. The notion of "college knowledge" (Conley 2005), that is the knowledge and skills which students should know and be able to do in order to succeed postsecondary is a particularly useful direction which brings purpose to the pathways as they head to differentiated outcomes.. This requires greater focus in the senior secondary school on the demands of the particular pathways that students are choosing to move down rather than the conventional emphasis on the academic disciplines of the curriculum. It also requires postsecondary providers to be explicit about requirements in terms of academic preparation, to reach out to incoming students and for there to be integration of careers advice if successful transitions are to be effected.

Conclusion

This paper suggests that as the education system has moved towards meeting the goal of five years of universal secondary education pursuing an increasingly general, academic curriculum, the goal of providing universal pathways to success has moved further away. Where once options existed, openings and pathways decreased and there developed a group of students disengaged from an education that was lacking focus for them - they could see no credible progression to higher qualifications from the narrow path that their schooling had become and this was happening at a time when the strait gate to youth employment was narrowing. One recent commentator concludes that "New Zealand still struggles to comprehend the full impact of mass post-primary schooling some 60 years after its inception" (Lee *et al.* 2007). Nowhere is this more apparent in than in the management of transitions.

Recent discussions and actions have focussed on developing increased options and pathways that are flexible and which lead to postsecondary qualifications and a ticket to employment. New Zealand, after several decades of adding alternative programmes (such as gateway, STAR and suchlike) in an attempt to provide options in which in the priority learners group, would find increased success and meaningful pathways to success and employment. The polytechnic system developed an increasing focus on Level 1-3 programmes and achieving a seamless progression from these levels into programmes at higher levels remains a challenge.

New Zealand is joined by other English speaking systems to develop a greater understanding of the need to provide multiple, seamless pathways for all young people to programmes at higher levels that in turn lead to qualifications that open up avenues to employment and all the benefits that go with that (Kirst and Venezia 2004, Oakes and Saunders 2008, Kazis *et al.* 2004).

If the education of a young person were to be a musical composition it would have many transitions in it which assist the flow, shape and beauty of the music rather than one in which the piece is brought to an abrupt and sudden end.

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