

ABSTRACT

James Ronald Welch, *MOVING FROM THE MIDDLE: AN EXPLORATION OF STUDENT EXPERIENCES TRANSITIONING TO HIGH SCHOOL IN INTERNATIONAL SETTINGS* (Under the direction of Dr. Matthew Militello). Department of Educational Leadership, March 2019.

The current study sought to understand the stress of the eighth grade to high school transition at the International School Bangkok (ISB) and make recommendations for improving this experience. Transitioning from middle school to high school is one of the most stressful events in an adolescent's life due to physiological and social-emotional changes they experience at this time. Twelve students from the American, Thai, Japanese, and Korean communities were followed for their first three high school semesters to understand the difficulties of the middle school to high school transition. These students, along with four counselors at the school, were my Co-Practitioner-Researchers (CPR), and through their experiences, we came to understand the struggles involved in this transition at the ISB. Collection of data in participatory action research (PAR) Cycle 1 was through a transition survey and CPR drawings of the most stressful aspect of the transition, which I clarified in an interview. In PAR Cycle 2, CPR members photographed the most stressful part of the transition, then reaching consensus themes as a group. Students kept a weekly diary of time usage. In PAR Cycle 3, the CPR team completed a survey of the stress of the tenth-grade transition. Interviews with students and counselors were analyzed. Finally, a community learning exchange (CLE) was conducted at the end of Cycle 3 to present the study findings to ISB colleagues. At the CLE, I collected data through Journey Lines and interviews from staff on student stress of the tenth-grade transition. Data analysis indicated that academic stress, time management, social pressures, and student-teacher relationships were the emerging themes in PAR Cycle 1. The same themes, along with internal pressure were evident in PAR Cycle 2. In PAR Cycle 3, university planning, time management, academic grades, and after-school activities, were their primary stressors. The findings of this

study provide meaningful information about student stress involved in transitioning from middle school to high school in international schools and offers advice on how to improve this transition.

MOVING FROM THE MIDDLE: AN EXPLORATION OF STUDENT EXPERIENCES
TRANSITIONING TO HIGH SCHOOL IN INTERNATIONAL SETTINGS

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TRANSITIONING TO HIGH SCHOOL IN INTERNATIONAL SETTINGS

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my son, Andrew Walker Welch, and to our family who is no longer with us: my mother, Margaret, my father, Ron, and my sister, Sherree.

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This work did not happen in isolation, and I could not have completed it without the help and support of my professors, colleagues, friends, and family. I want to thank my wife, Wendy, for her support and understanding through this academic journey and for being a fantastic mother. My son, Andrew, thank you for the laughter and joy you brought to my life on a daily basis. My friends, Stan and Lowell, thank you for providing support, laughter, and insight over the past three years.

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CHAPTER 1: NAMING AND FRAMING FOCUS OF PRACTICE (FoP)

Introduction

The transition from middle school to high school is a critical milestone in a young person's life. No longer a child, the adolescent is not yet an adult, and changing from middle school to high school adds the dimensions of physical and psychological adjustments to the general anxiety of the change (McLeod, 2008). Major differences between middle and high school, both academics and social, make this transition from middle school to high school difficult (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Willens (2013) indicated: "It's a time when the cognitive, emotional, and physical are all coming together. The school are likely new environments, and the students have more autonomy and more homework" (p. 2). Moving from eighth to ninth grade often causes a dip in academic performance and an increase in absences and behavioral problems. According to one source, ninth graders have the "lowest grade point average, the most missed classes, the majority of failing grades, and more behavioral referrals" than any other grade in high school (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010, p. 60). In the US, the ninth grade has the highest enrollment of any high school grade level due to approximately 22% of ninth grade students repeating this grade, and because passing ninth grade is the gateway to completing high school, repeating a grade increases the chance of not completing high school (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010).

For example, in the US in 1970, there were only 3% fewer tenth graders than ninth graders; by 2000 that number had risen to 11% (Nield, 2009). For students in international schools, this same trajectory of repeating ninth grade does not typically apply; nonetheless, it is a time of transition in the ways that are difficult for every adolescent. This participatory action research (PAR) project aimed to investigate that transition through the experiences of twelve adolescents with the support of five adults who are helping them track that transition. This project can be used to inform the school at which I teach about the reality of that

transition and make recommendations about supporting that transition in ways that ensure student success.

Eighth graders are not only entering high school, which can be intimidating, but they are also experiencing adolescent apprehension and relying on underdeveloped decision-making skills. Their physical, psychological, and neurological changes thwart their own best efforts at maintaining stability, and they make mistakes because of lack of experience.

Psychoanalyst Linda Stern reported that:

Students entering high school—just at the time brains are in flux—still have the propensity to be impulsive and are prone to making mistakes. They are therefore experimental and trying to separate and might try substances that interfere with the normal developmental process. Put all that together with raging hormones, the normal academic pressures, and meeting a whole new group to be judged by (as cited in Willens, 2013, p. 3).

Major life transitions often have profound effects on health and identity, which tend to make adolescents overly focused on self. Of course, young adolescents are going through puberty, which means they are experiencing many physiological and psychological changes along with the physical that can make this transition difficult. In combination with this are the identity and social-emotional decisions. Finally, adolescents are adrift when making decisions. Unlike adults who can look back at successful transitions in the past as guides through current transitions, they lack that experience and reflective attribute. Knowing this, it is important to note that young children do not have as many experiences to reflect back on to help them with transitions, which makes having a support system essential for dealing with transitions (Kolakowski, 2013).

The predictably complicated transition from middle school to high school is challenging for students in international schools since, in addition to the changes identified above, they experience cultural and social adjustments. International schools usually consist of more than one nationality; thus, there are socio-cultural aspects of that context. While that represents the rich diversity of international schools, for some students, that very diversity

sometimes makes this transition difficult for students in multiple ways. First, they have to interact with students from multiple cultures and often what is termed a third culture kid (Ittel & Sisler, 2012); second, they are not in their home country, and third, they are typically in an American school, in which the norms of the American schools and English as academic language are required. In addition, family cultural values about education come into play.

In addition, international schools, as a whole, do not share the same economic issues as average students in public schools in the United States (US). The average district public school per pupil expenditure in the US in 2012 was \$11,014 and the average private school tuition was \$10,740 (K-12, 2016). At the International School Bangkok (ISB) the average cost of tuition is around \$26,000 a year (“School Story and History—International School Bangkok,” 2017), much higher than the cost of attending public or private schools in the US. The students at the ISB are typically from affluent families, or their parents are able to provide their schooling for free through their place of business, while in the United States (US), 51% of all students come from low-income families according to a study by the Southern Education Foundation (Layton, 2015). Despite having a socioeconomic advantage over the average American student, these international students still have to make socio-cultural, psychological, and physiological adjustments for the transition from middle school to high school just like their U.S. counterparts. In fact, one of the pressures on them is from the family. The family expectations for them, largely unspoken but clear, are to achieve at a high level and gain admission to a prestigious university. Li (2012) stated in *Cultural Foundations of Learning* that “nowhere is competition for education as intense as in East Asia” (p. 65). Children of East Asia and East Asian heritage feel intense pressure to achieve in school from their parents. She noted regardless of where Asian parents live, they want their children to be the best in their class, get the best education, and to attend the best schools.

At the ISB, where I am a high school physics teacher, students have talked to me about the difficulty they have had adjusting to the academic demands of high school. Coupled with the familial expectations, students have complained to me about the increase in homework assignments, the difficulty in writing scientific lab reports, and understanding where they are academically due to a different grading scale used in the high school. There is a great deal of stress placed on students due to their grades now counting on their college transcript and expectations in the classroom are greater in high school. ISB students mentioned a noticeable increase in the difficulty of course work between eighth and ninth grade. Historically, limited communication between the middle school and the high school in terms of content and skills has been an issue although the ISB is currently working to vertically align the kindergarten to twelfth-grade curriculum to create a natural progression of content and skills between each successive grade level that will be enforced. In Chapter 3, I discuss the full context of the ISB, how that context influences the design of the project, and introduces the co-practitioner researchers—the student participants and counselors who have agreed to participate in this PAR. The transition is obviously stressful for students, and the co-research team and I want to look at the program we have in place at the ISB to see whether it can be improved in order to reduce the stress of this transition.

This chapter introduces the focus of practice (FoP), provides an overview of the assets and challenges associated with the focus of practice, shares my improvement goal, and discusses the purpose and a preliminary theory of action. The framework for this PAR, including the significance of my FoP, guides the research questions and the design overview, which are discussed in detail in Chapter 4 (Methodology).

Focus of Practice (FoP)

A focus of practice (FoP) is a way to look deeply at an issue and zero in on a focus area that has the potential to contribute to and influence a larger issue. In this case, the FoP is

to improve the academic and social-emotional transition from middle school to high school by creating a collaborative research team to collect and analyze student data and recommend policies, procedures, and rituals for the transition from middle school to high school at the ISB. Because the ISB students experience spoken and unspoken complexities in the transition from middle school to high school, the intent is to uncover those complexities and support the school in its efforts to revisit the current system in place and improve the transition practice in order to reduce the stress of the passage between eighth and ninth grade.

The PAR documented and analyzed this transition at the ISB through the experiences of twelve eighth graders; four co-practitioner researchers (CPRs) and I worked in collaboration with the twelve students from American, Thai, Japanese, and Korean communities as they transitioned to and experienced ninth grade at the ISB. Seeing this transition from students' perspective helped us to understand how the current ISB transitional process can be improved. Through this PAR, I hope to help make this transition easier for future students moving from middle school to high school. In the next section, I highlight evidence that supports my FoP, which is more deeply discussed in the diagnostic section of Chapter 3.

Evidence about Transition for Students: Assets and Challenges

This section includes an overview of the evidence with regard to assets and challenges that may affect the project by discussing the assets and challenges related to the project that appear on Figure 1, the fishbone diagram that is based on the work of school improvement by Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu (2015) and Mintrop (2016). I divided the assets and challenges into those on the micro level—students, teachers, and counselors; at the meso level in the school organization; and at the macro policy level. The ISB has several current practices and policies that support the transition and are assets that the CPRs want to retain. These include: the counseling system and the preparation they provide for eighth graders, the

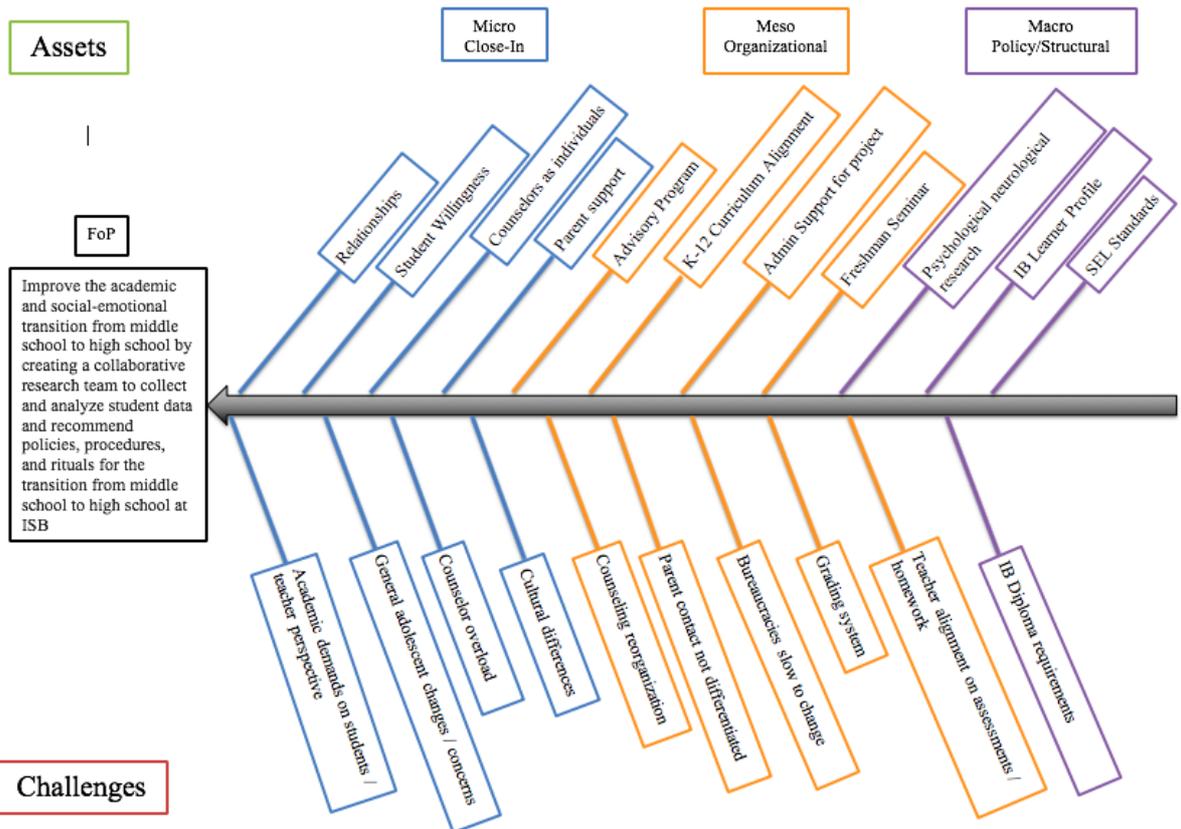


Figure 1. Fishbone diagram of the micro, meso, and macro assets and challenges.

organizational supports that include curricular alignment, Freshman Seminar, and the Advisory process.

Assets

Several micro assets, or close-in assets, were essential to our action research. The relationships that I had with the twelve student co-researchers along with their willingness to participate in our action research were assets. My co-researchers, who experienced the student transitions first hand, provided honest feedback based on the relationship of trust and care we developed. Initially, I met with my co-researchers twice to gain their support. Their insights during our meetings gave me a baseline of their initial concerns before they transitioned into ninth grade. The counselors in both the middle school and high school were an excellent resource in terms of learning about the transition from the counseling perspective. I have developed a close relationship with the high school counselors and the high school activity coordinator in our five years of working together and have also developed a healthy working relationship with the eighth-grade counselor. The high school activity coordinator and I have discussed the transition interventions in place now and how the transition is handled through the high school Advisory program. Parent support was also a critical asset to have since without their support their son or daughter would not have participated in this PAR.

The meso or organizational assets include the high school Advisory program, K–12 curriculum alignment, administrative support for this project, and the Freshman Seminar sessions. Teachers were aware of the vertical alignment and the skills that students should have entering their course. The middle school and high school administrators were helpful in terms of answering questions about the transition and were keen to learn how the transition could be improved. The Advisory program is a regular meeting of a small group of students with a teacher, who acts as the advisor. Freshman Seminar is a semester-long course in which

ninth graders learn about transitioning into high school, about getting involved in the community, about registering for school events, about using the library, about managing their time, about freedom from chemical dependency, how to live a healthy lifestyle, and get an introduction on the university application process (Memo, November 7, 2017).

The macro, or policy and structural assets in place for this PAR were the psychological and neurological research that is available along with social and emotional learning (SEL) standards and the IB Diploma Learner Profile.

Challenges

In addition to assets, there were challenges with this research. The micro challenges were academic demands on students and teacher perspectives, general adolescent changes, counselor overload, and cultural differences. The high school teachers understand the rigor involved in the IB Diploma, and they have two years to prepare students for this academic transition. The academic demands in ninth grade are more challenging than eighth grade, and the results the students achieve now count toward university acceptance, unlike their grades in middle school, as there is uneven alignment with middle school. High school teachers feel more stress to prepare students for college, and that stress can be passed down to students causing the academic transition to be more difficult. In addition, the counselors are overloaded with work—especially the initial ninth grade counselor in the study, who had to meet the needs of the entire ninth grade class up until August 2017. In August of 2017, three counselors were assigned as social-emotional counselors for grades 9–12, instead of having one counselor per grade level. One challenge outside of our control was that students were going through physical and emotional changes of puberty. Finally, cultural differences were also a challenge since different cultures deal with stress and the transition to high school differently.

Bureaucracies are slow to change. The meso or organizational challenges were the counseling department, parent contact not differentiated, different grading systems between middle school and high school, and teacher alignment on assessments. The counseling department was reorganized in 2017 because there were insufficient counselors for student needs. Parents often do not realize the differences between the academic, social, and emotional transition between middle school and high school and how settling into a new academic and social environment is complex for their children. Students face a different grading system in high school than in middle school, so it is difficult for them at first to understand how well they are doing. High school teachers can be more isolated from their students than in middle school, making it more difficult to align schedules for student assignments.

The major macro concern was the IB Diploma requirements that the students have to satisfy to graduate from the ISB. Students spend the first two years of high school preparing for entry into the IB Diploma and these preparatory courses can be quite challenging compared to the courses students took in middle school. Creativity, activity, and service (CAS) hours are required in each grade level. CAS is organized around the three strands of creativity, action, and service. Service experience for students usually involves investigation, reflection, and demonstration, and each student in CAS is expected to maintain a complete CAS portfolio as evidence of their engagement (*International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme Subject Brief Creativity, activity, service, 2015*).

The fishbone diagram in Figure 1 illustrates the assets and challenges of my FoP. The FoP has been defined as the head of the fish and extending from the head from left to right is the backbone of the diagram. The micro assets and challenges highlighted in blue, followed by the meso in orange, and the macro in purple. These lines and boxes that radiate from the backbone represent the structure of the assets and challenges of this PAR.

Framework for the FoP: Meta-Questions

As I examined the FoP, I wanted to keep key meta-frameworks and questions in mind (as shown in Figure 1) to guide me by more comprehensive efforts and continued to understand how this PAR and its micro focus fit in the larger world of school reform. As such, I examined the FoP from the five frameworks in the framework in Figure 2. I focused primarily on the psychological, socio-cultural, and (micro) political frames to inform the work we did to improve our practices for student transitions at the ISB. I focused on these frames when analyzing the more significant parts of the organizational and structural elements that influence the ISB. Often operating like an invisible hand, these larger elements had indirect but important impacts on the FoP.

These meta-frames and the questions that they generated were important to keep in mind during the study:

- Philosophical: What core values am I committed to in terms of equitable education for all students? What are the purposes of schooling that I advance by this research project?
- Psychological: How does competitiveness among students affect this transition? How do middle school teachers who do their own thing and not follow the curriculum hurt the transition of the students to high school?
- Socio-cultural: To what extent does culture play a role in a child adapting to this transition? Does the host country affect the culture of the school?
- (micro) Political: Will this project foster systemic change at the ISB? Will collaboration between middle school and high school improve due to this project?
- Economic: What economic impact will the recommendations of this action research have on the ISB? Will additional staffing needs be necessary when the recommendations are known?

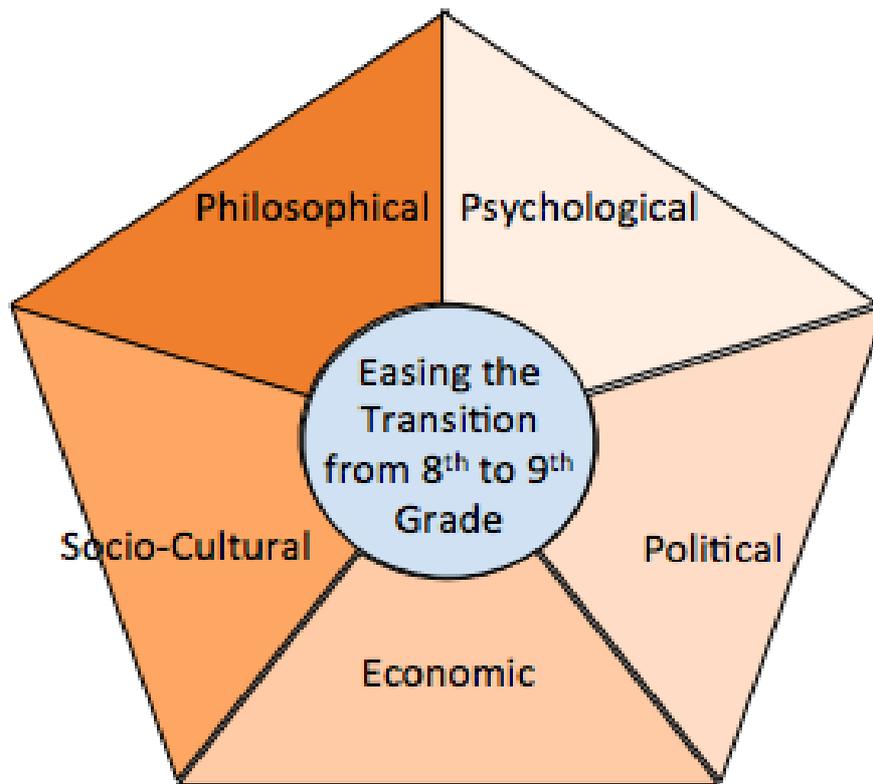


Figure 2. Pentagon: Frames that affect the project.

It was important to understand the historical reason why the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade at the International School Bangkok has become so stressful for students. Further, learning why the middle school and high school have different philosophies on grading and assessing work and why a common model for both schools is not in place was also imperative.

- The psychological frame was important for my investigation since there is a generalization about ninth grade being more difficult than eighth grade.
- The socio-cultural frame required that I understood both the context in which several races and ethnic groups approach high school. The socio-cultural frame sometimes emerged as an equity issue for this project. Six male and seven female students from the four largest nationalities from the ISB, which are American, Thai, Korean, and Japanese took part in this study.
- The political frame was actually more salient as micropolitical context of the school is discussed in more complexity in Chapter 3.
- The economic frame was also one that I needed to be aware of in this transition. While on the surface not directly related to this project, the economic situation of the school has an impact on the political climate. The ISB started the process of rightsizing staff in 2017 due to decline in enrollment. In my investigation, I had to be aware of how the current economic state of the school was affecting this transit.

Improvement Goal: Purpose and Theory of Action

The aim of my FoP was to improve the academic and social-emotional transition from middle school to high school by creating a collaborative research team of twelve students to collect and analyze student data and establish policies, procedures, and rituals for the transition from middle school to high school at the ISB.

Goal and Driver Diagram

Aspects of this transition worked well, and others needed some attention. Thus, I discuss the goal in light of the assets and challenges of Figure 1 and demonstrate through the driver diagram in Figure 3 the primary and secondary drivers for this PAR to achieve our aim/goal. However, the action research cannot focus on all the assets and challenges identified in Figure 1. In order for the transition from middle to high school to become more useful and supportive for the students, I focused my exploration on the experiences of the twelve students and the communication between the two schools on primary and secondary drivers. The primary drivers were: (1) professional learning community of students, the counselors, and me; (2) me, as the primary co-researcher, and the eighth and ninth grade counselors. The secondary drivers were structures or people who had some effect on the project: heads of departments, the Advisory program, Freshman Seminar process, the high school principal and high school Dean of Students. I participated in the curriculum alignment and grading meetings for science and technology. The students, counselors, and I met twice a semester, and the counselors and I participated directly in the Advisory system implementation.

Once the PAR was complete, I shared my results with the middle school and high school principals, the teachers involved in eighth and ninth grade, the High School Activities Director, High School Dean of Students, Learning Support Coordinators, and EAL support teachers. The Driver Diagram (see Figure 3) represents the key areas of attention and effort of this project.

Theory of Action

A Theory of Action is a set of underlining assumptions about how CPRs will move our school from its current state to a desired future (Lauer, 2010). With my Theory of Action, I wanted to understand the difficulties students encounter with the transition from middle

Driver Diagram

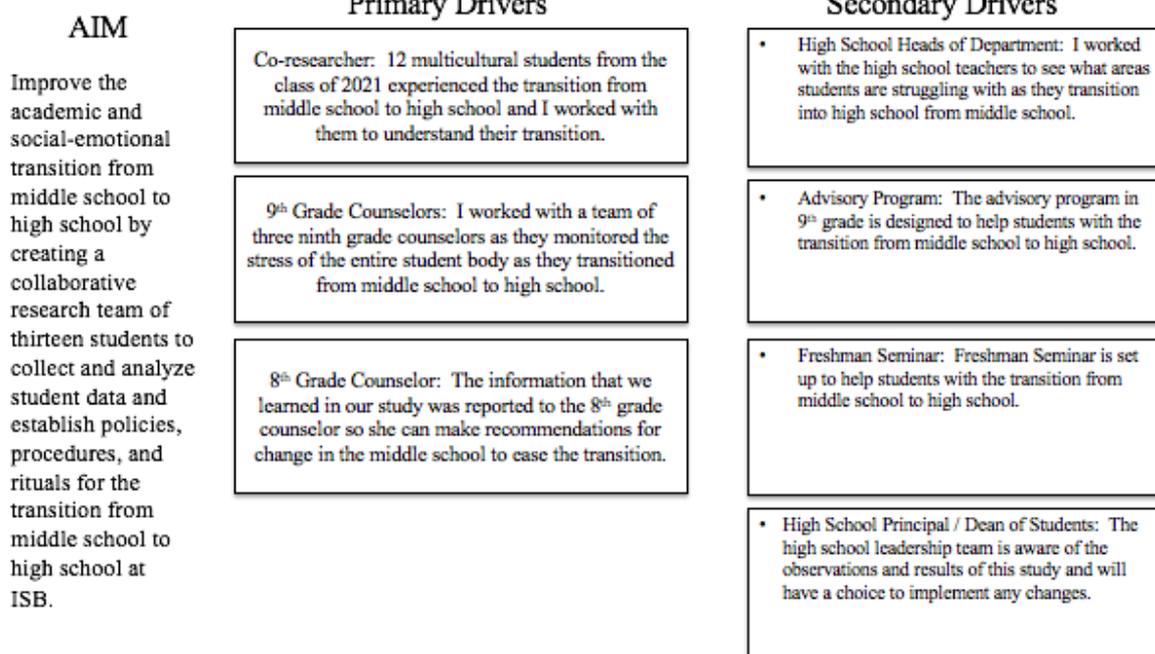


Figure 3. Primary and secondary drivers that influence the action research project.

school to high school at the ISB and to suggest changes to ease this transition for students. By learning from the transitioning students at the ISB, the Thai, Japanese, Korean, and American class of 2021, I could begin to understand why the passage from middle school is difficult academically and social-emotionally; this knowledge can lead to changes at the ISB to ease the transition for future students.

Significance of the FoP

The significance of this FoP was to understand why the transition from middle school to high school is challenging for students at the ISB. This study had potential benefits for this school and other institutions as well as policy considerations for transitions, grading, and curricular alignment. In terms of practice, if what I learned from this PAR could alleviate the challenges of the transition from middle school to high school, it would support students' adaption to the academic rigor of high school and better equip them socially and emotionally to handle the stress of high school. If students are better prepared academically, they stand a better chance of excelling academically in high school. Students who are prepared socially and emotionally have a better chance of dealing with setbacks and stress than a student who is not socially and emotionally prepared and gain experience in self-awareness, making decisions, and self-management ("Core SEL Competencies," 2018).

Conducting a PAR about this transition at the ISB had the potential to explain to the school administrators, teachers, and counselors why the transition is so stressful for students, enabling them to collectively make adjustments that would support students. This research could be used at other large international schools to analyze that school's transition from eighth to ninth grade, as this challenge is not unique to the ISB. Although I anticipated some issues like miscommunication being similar between the ISB and a typical public school in the US, I believed that due to the socio-economic standing of our students and their families, the ISB compared better to other international schools than a public school in the US.

Research Questions

In summary, the FoP for the PAR was developed to understand why the transition from middle school to high school is challenging for students at the ISB. The PAR examined the academic and social-emotional transitions from middle school to high school by creating a collaborative research team of four counselors, high school teachers, and twelve students to collect and analyze data, understand more deeply from the student perspective what they are experiencing, and recommend policies, procedures, and rituals for the transition from middle school to high school at the ISB. The underlying research question for this PAR was: How does the current transition structure at the ISB, through the experiences of a transnational group of student Co-Practitioner Researchers, equitably facilitate the passage students make from eighth grade to high school?

The sub-questions for our participatory action research project were:

- To what extent were students' academic needs equitably met by the high school transition structure?
- To what extent were students' social and emotional needs equitably met by the high school transition structure?
- To what extent did the counselors and administrators use student information in the project to change policy and practice?
- How did my participation in the PAR enhance my leadership practices?

Participatory Action Research Design

This section defines and describes the problem under investigation and the general context in which this investigation took place. The group that I investigated was the rising ninth grade and class of 2021 at the ISB. I followed the same group through ninth grade and monitored how they dealt with the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade. My role with this group was asking them questions about how they were dealing with change and what

they found helpful with the changes they had encountered in eighth and ninth grade. It was important to follow students who had come through the middle school of the ISB and who planned on continuing on into high school. It was also important that the students did not transfer into the ISB in ninth grade since they would have missed the middle school experience at the ISB, and my observations of them would not be relevant to my study.

As the action research progressed, I then analyzed and interpreted their situation as they transitioned and saw how well or poorly they were handling the transition. I learned whether the collaboration between middle school and high school teachers made a positive difference in this transition along with seeing how well the Advisory program helped them adjust socially and emotionally. Finally, I looked at my research and presented potential solutions about how to further improve the transition from middle school to high school (Stringer, 2014).

Study Limitations

When I began this study, I had seventeen years of teaching experience, between six different schools, having taught in six different countries. Nonetheless, I attempted to suspend personal belief and prior knowledge of schooling in order to allow the data to naturally occur and to build a theory of understanding. In closing, this study was limited by the sample size of the student population participating and the purposeful sampling methodology. The number of student participants also declined as the study progressed due to students transferring from the ISB ($n = 6$) or choosing to withdraw from the study ($n = 1$).

Contributions of the Study

When researching this topic of transitioning from middle school to high school, I was only able to find information on public schools and private Catholic schools in the US. In general, there are not many studies conducted in international school settings compared to public schools in the US. My research results can offer a small study of investigating the

psychological and socio-cultural factors involved in transitioning from middle school to high school in a large international school setting. Numerous studies have examined the physiological aspects of transitioning, but we do not know whether those results are similar in international settings. The same can be said for the psychological adjustment to high school. I learned in this study that stress evolves as students transition through high school and that culture plays a significant role in how students manage this stress. Not only does a student's heritage and culture play a meaningful role in this transition, but so does the culture of the school. The ISB is unique in that the four most represented nationalities are American, Thai, Japanese, and Korean, and the combination of these cultures creates a unique and stressful environment for transitioning students. Several studies have looked separately at the transition of American, Japanese, and Korean students, but few have been done looking at all three together. To my knowledge the information produced by this PAR on the Thai transition is the first study of this cultural group to English language research of eighth grade to ninth grade movement. I learned in this study that the Thai population tends to mirror the Confucius Heritage Cultures in their serious approach to education. This view of learning could be because the Thais at the ISB come from wealthy families that have high expectations for their children, or it could be that the heritage of the students in my study was from a Thai-Chinese culture. The other 124 international schools in Thailand ("List of Schools | ISAT," n.d.), could use this research to better understand and evaluate the eighth to ninth grade transition at their school.

Summary

My FoP, as presented in Chapter 1, attempts to understand why the transition from middle school to high school is challenging for students at the ISB. By examining the academic and social-emotional transition from middle school to high school and by creating a collaborative research team to collect data, I analyzed student data and better understand the

challenges for middle school students transitioning to high school at the ISB. In turn, I expected to have sufficient evidence to support the students in this study and offer input to policy and rituals that could better support students.

Chapter 2 presents the FoP knowledge base in the form of a literature review. In this chapter, I introduce the five literature areas that give meaning and background understanding to my project: (1) Physiological and Cognitive Development, (2) Psychological Changes and Challenges; (3) Socio-Cultural Context for Transitions; (4) Shifting Academic Demands; and (5) Complexities of Transitions. To understand the transition the twelve students involved in this project were going through, it was vital to understand the physiological and cognitive changes that were happening in their life during the study's timeframe. During puberty, several psychological changes happen, as the brain develops, and this causes decision-making changes and social anxiety in most adolescents. The twelve students that were a part of my study were from the American, Thai, Japanese and Korean cultures and understanding these cultures and how they handle transitions was important. There is an increase in academic pressures and demands as a student enters high school since grades now count for university acceptance and teachers assign more work. All of these factors combine with other factors to make this an incredibly complex and challenging transition.

Chapter 3 focuses on the context of the study and offers a diagnostic of the current situation at the ISB. Chapter 4 presents the methodology for the project in detail. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 present and describe the results of the three action research cycles of inquiry in this study. Chapter 8 presents the findings and implication of the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

School transitions represent a time of possibility and at times a chronic issue for students, educators, and parents alike. The transition from middle to high school has proven to be acutely problematic for many students. Eccles, Lord, and Midgley (1991) characterized the early adolescent years, for some children, as the beginning of a “downward spiral in school-related behaviors and motivation that often lead to academic failure and school dropout” (p. 521). These declines are not so extreme for most adolescents, but there is evidence of progressive decline in academic motivation, self-awareness, and school-related performance as student transition through school. Eccles and Roeser (2011) agreed that some adolescents benefit from their experience in school and thrive while others cope with the stress and demands without having much direction. Other young people find school unpleasant and challenging and are unable to determine the benefit of the experience.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the literature on the physiological, psychological, and socio-cultural factors related to the transition from middle school to high school. Clearly, this is a developmental period that has received much attention in the developmental and psychological literature, as this is a major transition point for young adolescents in many ways besides school transitions. This chapter describes the physiological and psychological frames that relate to this topic of transitions; it also reports the socio-cultural factors that affect the experiences of young people differently. The literature provides important considerations for the overarching research question for this study: How does the current transition structure at the ISB, through the experiences of a transnational group of student Co-Practitioner Researchers, equitably facilitate the passage students make from eighth grade to high school?

The review began with an interrogation of the conceptual, empirical, and dissertation studies related to the transition from middle school to high school. While these studies investigated this transition in general, it was difficult to find specific literature in the context of international schools. Nonetheless five distinct topic areas emerged from the literature and form the backbone of this chapter:

1. Physiological or Biological, including cognitive/intellectual
2. Relationships: Emotional or Affective Changes and Challenges
3. Socio-Cultural Context
4. Shifting Academic Demands of High School
5. Complexities of Transitions

Eccles and Roeser (2011) found that almost “all researchers now point to the confluence of changes at the biological, psychological, and social levels” (p. 233) as the reason that the transition to high school is so difficult. The main challenge for young adults at this age is dealing with puberty and the physical and emotional changes that accompany the physiological changes in their bodies. The onset of puberty often causes students to seek out new social settings, and they experience a different need of acceptance among their peers. Erikson (1968) stated one of the primary developmental tasks in adolescence is to become a member of a peer group, which allows young adults to seek out their individual interests and uncertainties while having a sense of belonging by being a part of a group. However, there are multiple social pressures beyond peer acceptance. Conformity to group interests and desires is necessary to belong to a group. Young adolescents are exposed to substance use, risk-taking behavior, and sexual activity when it may not be in their individual interest to do so (Santor, Messervey, & Kusumakar, 2000). The biological, psychological, and social changes can cause stress for adolescents and often they seek out substances to reduce their stress, which can lead to substance abuse (Park, Kim, Kim, & Sung, 2007). School is an

important social environment where students can experience a connectedness and feeling of care that can offset these risks. In school, parents, teachers, and counselors can encourage adolescence to explore and learn under the supervision and control of adults, which reduces the pressures that students may encounter (Park et al., 2007).

In addition to these biological, psychological, and social changes, students new to high school encounter a variety of challenges that add anxiety to the transition to high school when they are dealing with multiple other changes. One is of course increased academic expectations. Often there is a disconnect between middle school and high school in terms of course alignment and the quantity and quality of work that is demanded. Once students enter ninth grade, their grades now count towards university acceptance. Pressure tends to increase from parents of students who plan on going to university and from the student themselves to perform at the highest level possible. Finally, students have difficulty navigating the new physical environment in the typically larger high school setting. This physical change of buildings can lead to an increase in stress due to unfamiliar surroundings and leaving the security and familiarity of their middle school environment behind. All of this results in a host of complexities that become the ecology of a transition; they interact with each other as if they are an organism on their own and, if not addressed carefully, may compound.

Twelve students from the ISB class of 2021 formed my Co-Research Practitioner (CPR) team along with four counselors, three from the high school and one from the middle school. Through the experiences of these students, I learned about their struggles with the transition from eighth to ninth grade from a socio-cultural and psychological perspective and better understood how equitable the transition is for the various student groups involved in this project.

Figure 4 illustrates the components of my literature review. A brief discussion about the transition between middle school and high school begins this literature review; an



Figure 4. Components of the literature review.

examination of how academics affect this transition then follows. My literature review then considers the role that relationships play in this transition. These relationships are those made between students and between students and teachers. I then investigate the onset of puberty and the physiological, intellectual, psychological, and the social and emotional development factors that affect the transition. The literature review concludes with a discussion of how cultural roles and norms impact this transition.

Physiological and Cognitive

Physiological development indicates changes to the human body, which include growth, enhanced gross and fine motor skills, and biological sophistication. In early adolescence, a young adult experiences more developmental changes than any other time outside of their first two years of life, and this growth can be accelerated and irregular (Fenwick, 1987). In this section, I discuss puberty, the brain development of adolescents, and intellectual development as it influences cognition, and moral development.

Puberty

Manning and Bucher (2012) stated that puberty is a stage of physiological change initiated by the release of hormones, which starts in early adolescence. The beginning of puberty is a profound developmental period with hormones signaling the development of primary and secondary sex characteristics, with girls usually maturing one to two years earlier than boys (Caskey & Anfara, 2014; Dahl, 2004). Blyth and Simmons (2008) wrote that these highly visible changes and contrasting rates of maturity cause many young adults to feel uncomfortable about differences in their evolving physical appearance. According to Kellough and Kellough (2008), variations in basal metabolism caused youths to also experience times of heightened restlessness and lassitude.

Kellough and Kellough (2008) found that young adolescents begin puberty around the age of ten and a half years for girls and eleven and a half to twelve years of age for boys.

During puberty there is an increase in height, weight, and internal organ size as well as changes to skeletal and muscular systems. Due to this rapid growth, bones grow faster than muscles and adolescents tend to have coordination issues. Literal growing pains occur when muscles and tendons do not sufficiently protect bone.

The onset of puberty occurs when the gene *KiSS-1* prompts the hypothalamus to release gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GRH), which triggers the pituitary gland to release two forms of gonadotropin: luteinizing hormone and follicle-stimulating hormone. These two hormones then cause the testes in males to start producing testosterone and the ovaries in females to produce estrogen, promoting sex characteristics in males and females. In males this chemical change initiates sperm production; while in females the menstrual cycle begins. (Armstrong, 2006). Sisk and Foster (2004) noted that these hormones have a direct impact on brain development, which causes young adolescents to have emotional changes in addition to physical changes. These changes can make adolescents impulsive, irritable, rebellious, and can cause mood changes (Armstrong, 2006).

Brain Development in Puberty

During the teenage years of adolescence, human brains are more powerful and susceptible than at any other time in our lives. Human brains are the most powerful at this time due to the number of synapses humans possess. This allows young adolescents to learn more efficiently due to the number of connections between brain cells. During this period, teenagers grow their cognitive abilities and work on their shortcomings. At birth, humans start with an excess of synapses and as they age, their brains eliminate unused connections. As individuals learn new information, work on motor tasks, or have new experiences, they strengthen the connections in their brains. This is known as synaptic plasticity and is more robust in young adolescents than in adults (Perkins-Gough, 2015).

Giedd (2004) stated that in the early stages of puberty, synaptic pruning takes place causing the brain's neural circuitry to be reconstructed. In males, the rapid increase of testosterone production at puberty causes the amygdala to increase in size. Giedd, Vaituzis, Hamburger, Lange, Rajapakse, and Kaysen (1996) noted that the amygdala is part of the limbic system commonly known as the emotional part of the brain, which is responsible for generating feelings of anger and fear. Born, Shea, and Steiner (2002) elaborated that studies have shown that estrogen seems to affect the levels of serotonin in female brains at puberty, which causes depression rates in teenage girls to increase. Giedd, Blumenthal, Jeffries, Castellanos, Liu, and Zijdenbos (1999) noted that it is also thought that gonadal hormones may have a part in rapidly increasing the amount of gray matter in the frontal, parietal, and temporal lobes of the neocortex just before puberty, followed by a decline afterwards.

As a result of puberty, an early adolescent has a relatively developed limbic system with an underdeveloped prefrontal cortex. The prefrontal cortex of the brain controls executive functions like controlling impulses, reasoning, anticipating consequences, attention, and planning (Perkins-Gough, 2015). Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) allows doctors and researchers an opportunity to study the human brain in real time as they observe regions that light up when patients are thinking specific thoughts or performing actions. Using fMRI technology, scientists have determined that teenagers have not built strong connections laterally or anteroposteriorly in their brains at this age (Perkins-Gough, 2015). Perkins-Gough (2015), cited a major study done by the National Institutes of Health that found the human brain constructs connectivity from the posterior to the anterior as individuals age. This means that the frontal lobe is the last part of the brain to develop strong connectivity and is not complete until early adulthood. Adolescents have a frontal lobe but cannot access it to make instant decisions like an adult can (Perkins-Gough, 2015).

An analogy used by Thomas Armstrong (2006) to explain adolescents at this age is that “young teens’ brains have their accelerators pressed all the way to the floor, while their brakes have yet to be installed” (p. 8).

Intellectual Development and Cognition

Intellectual development is how humans “organize their minds, ideas and thoughts to make sense of the world they live in” (“Intellectual Development,” n.d.). Humans learn in a variety of ways like trial and error, copying, exploring, questioning, talking, listening, playing, and repeating. The two main areas of intellectual development are language development and cognitive development. Language development allows us to organize our thoughts and to make sense of the world around us (“Intellectual Development,” n.d.). It helps us as humans to “ask questions and to develop simple ideas into more complex ideas” (“Intellectual Development,” n.d.). Language development is different for everyone and depends on an individual’s pattern of development, his or her age, and time to experiment and use language. Cognitive development is the “construction of thought processes, including remembering, problem solving, and decision-making, from childhood through adolescence to adulthood” (“Cognitive Development—stages, meaning, average, Definition, Description, Common problems,” 2018). Through the interaction of genetic and learned factors, humans understand how we perceive events, think, and understand the world around us (“Cognitive Development—stages, meaning, average, Definition, Description, Common problems,” 2018).

Masi, Brovedani, and Poli (1998) stated that there is interconnectedness between emotional and intellectual development during adolescents. Several attempts have been made to define the qualitative changes of cognitive functioning in adolescents “deriving from converging biological, psychological, and social factors” (p. 127). Jean Piaget (1896-1980) was a French psychologist who proposed the most well-known and influential theory on

cognitive development. Piaget proposed that a child's knowledge is composed of basic units of knowledge called schemas and are used to organize past experiences to use as a springboard for understanding new experiences. Schemas are constantly being altered by two interdependent processes he called assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation allows people to understand new experiences by relating them to known experiences.

Accommodation is the result of the schema changing to accept the new knowledge. Piaget thought cognitive development involved an ongoing process of trying to achieve balance between assimilation and accommodation that he called equilibration ("Cognitive Development—stages, meaning, average, Definition, Description, Common problems," 2018).

Piaget's theory of cognitive development proposes that children move through four stages of mental development and focuses on how children acquire knowledge and understand the nature of intelligence. Piaget thought that children continually add knowledge from their interaction with the world around them and build upon this knowledge, much like a scientist, by doing experiments and making observations (Cherry, 2018).

Piaget divided his theory of cognitive development into four stages: the Sensorimotor Stage (birth to 2 years), the Preoperational Stage (2 to 7 years), the Concrete Operational Stage (7 to 11 years), and the Formal Operational Stage (11 years and up). During the Sensorimotor Stage of cognitive development, infants and toddlers achieve knowledge by manipulating objects and through sensory experiences. A tremendous amount of growth happens during this stage despite it only lasting two years. During the Preoperational Stage the emergence of language is one of the major achievements. Children learn to use words and pictures to represent objects and struggle to see the perspective of others. In the Concrete Operational Stage, children start to think logically and become more organized. Children become less egocentric during this stage and begin to understand how other people might feel

and think. The final stage is the Formal Operational Stage, which is where students are when they transition from middle school to high school. During this stage, adolescents start to think abstractly and begin to think about moral, philosophical, ethical, political, and social issues that require more abstract and theoretical reasoning (Cherry, 2018).

Intellectual development is the measure of how individuals learn to think and reason for themselves in relation to the world around them (“What Does Intellectual Development Mean?,” 2018). In early adolescence, youth display a wide range of individual intellectual development, which is not as evident as physical growth, and includes improvements in metacognition and independent thought (Fenwick, 1987). Kellough and Kellough (2008) noted that young adolescents in general are curious and have numerous interests and Brighton (2007) found that they are eager to learn about material they find interesting and helpful. Young adults also tend to favor active learning experiences over passive ones and show a tendency to choose collaborative approaches in educational activities. Young adolescents also favor learning experiences and tasks that are authentic or based on real life experiences over more traditional academic subjects. Kellough and Kellough (2008) concluded that students in this age group also have a heightened ability to ponder their future, foresee their own needs, and establish personal goals.

Moral Development

Moral development is “the process through which children develop proper attitudes and behaviors toward other people in society, based on social and cultural norms, rules, and laws” (“Moral Development—Symptoms, Stages, Definition, Description, Common Problems,” n.d.). Schooling is a moral venture, and values issues thrive in the process and content of teaching. Teacher and student interaction in school results in human struggle no different than other social organizations like families or religious institutions. Schools have not been viewed as institutions for moral education, but they do have an effect on the social

development of adolescents (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Moral development represents the changes that develop in a person's form or framework of thought. Values vary from culture to culture; the study of cultural values cannot explain how an individual will act in a social environment or how a person will solve problems related to his/her personal situation (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). According to Kohlberg and Hersh (1977), "This requires the analysis of developing structures of moral judgment, which are found to be universal in a developmental sequence across cultures" (p. 54).

Longitudinal and cross-cultural studies have been done using hypothetical moral dilemmas by Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, and others to show that moral reasoning develops through six stages over time. These stages show that individuals are consistent with their level of moral judgment, that progression through these stages is always forward, stages are sequential and never skipped, and that thinking at a higher stage shows comprehension of lower stage thinking (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Each additional stage of reasoning replaces an earlier stage but not everyone reaches every stage.

At Preconventional level, there are the first two stages: Punishment-and-Obedience Orientation and Individualism and Exchange (McLeod, 2011). At this level, a child is aware of cultural rules and the labels of right or wrong, good and bad, but understands these concepts through punishment and reward (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). At this stage children understand that there is more than one correct viewpoint. This stage is representative of where most children are by the age of nine (McLeod, 2011).

The next is the Conventional level, which consists of stages three and four: the Good Interpersonal Relationships and Maintaining the Social Order (McLeod, 2011). Most adolescents and adults fall under this level of moral reasoning. At this level, preserving the expectations of the individual's family, group, or nation is recognized as important, regardless of any consequences. This attitude displays loyalty to social order and conformity

to personal expectations (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Individuals internalize the accepted moral standard of admired adult role models, and reasoning is based on the norms of the group (McLeod, 2011).

The final level is the Postconventional, autonomous, or principled level and consists of the final two stages: Social Contract and Individual Rights and the Universal Principles (McLeod, 2011). At this level, moral values and principles have been clearly defined by the individual “apart from the authority of the groups or persons holding these principles and apart from the individual’s own identification with these groups” (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977, p. 55). It is estimated that only 10-15% of individuals are capable of reaching the necessary abstract thought to reach this stage. This means that most people get their moral views from those around them and only this small percentage think through ethical principles for themselves (McLeod, 2011).

Early in adolescence, young adults start developing values and beliefs that will remain with them throughout their life and tend to favor similar values to their parents or influential adults (Caskey & Anfara, 2014, Scales, 2010). Kellough and Kellough (2008) found that young adults also tend to have a strong sense of fairness and are idealistic. During early adolescence, young adults evolve from being self-centered to more open to about the feelings of others (Caskey & Anfara, 2014; Scales, 2010). Kellough and Kellough (2008) stated that early adolescents start to view moral issues in their lives as being less absolute and more vague, which causes them to struggle with making solid moral and ethical choices.

Psychological Changes and Challenges

There are predictable and unpredictable changes as young adults transition from adolescents to young adulthood. Adolescents may face “challenges in their roles, relationships, and responsibilities” (Jivanjee, Kruzich, & Gordon, 2008, p. 435). In this section, I discuss the psychological changes that adolescents go through, along with their

needs, identity formation, behavior fluctuation, social and emotional development, how they have a need for belonging and forming relationships, a sense of belonging for minorities, and the role that teachers play with psychological changes in adolescents.

Psychological Changes

Psychological development is “the development of human beings’ cognitive, emotional, intellectual, and social capabilities and functioning over the course of the life span, from infancy through old age” (“Psychological Development,” n.d., 1). Adolescence represents a period in life where a child is taking part in the transformation of becoming an adolescent, as psychological, biological, and social changes are happening concurrently (Schaffhuser, Allemand, & Schwarz, 2017). Adolescents are coping with sudden changes to their bodies, controlling their sexual interests, and developing new relationships with peers, while determining their academic and professional futures (Perry & Pauletti, 2011).

Susman and Dorn found that heightened cognitive skills in early adolescence allow young adults to think abstractly about themselves, and studies have shown that the onset and timing of puberty can psychologically affect how early adolescents adjust to this stage in their lives (as cited in Schaffhuser, Allemand, & Schwarz, 2017, pp. 775—776). However, cognitive changes in early adolescence may lead to increased risk taking and increased sensation seeking (Schaffhuser et al., 2017). Changes in the physical appearance during puberty cause an increase awareness of gender identity (Perry & Pauletti, 2011) and may, as Hill and Lynch found, emphasize stereotypical gender role behavior (as cited in Schaffhuser et al., 2017, p. 775). I discuss in this chapter about the needs of adolescents, followed by describing identify formation, behavior fluctuation, social and emotional development, the importance of relationships and sense of belonging, and the role of teacher/student relationships.

Adolescents' brains are very excitable and impressionable due to the number of synapses they are having at this time. These synapses increase by being excited, which means good experiences leave their impression more quickly but so do bad experiences. These excitable synapses combined with slow neural connections to their frontal cortex, in addition to a surge in hormones, make adolescents very emotional. Teenagers lack an emotion-regulating function due to an underdeveloped frontal-lobe connection in their brains. This causes teenagers to have emotions drive their behavior more than at any other time in their life (Perkins-Gough, 2015).

Adolescent needs. Every young adolescent has unique developmental and basic psychological needs that must be supported in school for them to be successful (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013). The theory of self-determination proposes that humans have three basic psychological needs: (1) relatedness, which is the need to associate with others; (2) competence, which is the capacity to effectively respond to one's environment; and (3) autonomy, which is the need to control one's life (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013). Self-determination is related to autonomy, and "motivation, engagement, learning and wellbeing will be highest in classrooms and schools in which the climate and culture stress and provide opportunities for the student to feel autonomous, competent, and emotionally supported" (Lamb & Lerner, 2015, p. 229) regarding Self-Determination Theory.

Identity formation. Young adults often find it difficult to find their identity as Erik Erikson found (McLeod, 2008). The essential task of this period of life is to become independent from their parents—especially the same-sex parent—and to create an identity of their own by defining who they are (Fleming, 2018). Adolescents tend to try and find their identity by interacting with people of significant interest who are around them during this intensely social time in their lives where young adults are looking for a sense of belonging,

community, social status, and emotional closeness (Armstrong, 2006). Fleming (2018) asserted that “Identities are tried out like new suits of clothes” (p. 10). Role models may be parents, teachers, musicians, coaches, entertainers, athletes, or unsavory characters (Fleming, 2018).

Erikson (1968) defined adolescence as “a turning point of increased vulnerability and heightened potential” (p. 96). Erikson stated that young adolescents are involved in two stages of identity formation. The first stage is industry versus inferiority when ten-to-eleven-year-olds classify themselves by the work and skills they execute well. The second stage is ego identity versus role confusion when twelve-to-eighteen-year-olds “search for a sense of self and personal identity, through an intense exploration of personal values, beliefs and goals” (McLeod, 2008). Kellough and Kellough (2008) found that while young adults are seeking their adult identity and adult acceptance, they also want the approval of their peers.

Behavior fluctuation. In general, the early stages of adolescence can be intense and unpredictable (Caskey & Anfara, 2014; Scales, 2010). Kellough and Kellough (2008) found that during these early stages, young adults can be moody and restless and can display erratic behavior. These young adults can be very sensitive to criticism and self-conscious about their personal shortcomings. The self-esteem of young adults in this age group does tend to improve over time, while their capability in academic subjects, sports, and creative activities deteriorates (Caskey & Anfara, 2014; Scales, 2010). Erikson (1968) discussed coping mechanisms that teens use during the Fifth Stage for an adolescent who is confronting their own identities. Foreclosure is a coping strategy that is used to suppress anxiety about having a lack of identity. This is where some adolescents “prematurely assume an identity of convenience, someone else’s value system, such as that of one’s parents, without giving the matter very much thought or consideration” (Fleming, 2018, pp. 9-12). Moratorium is a coping mechanism that allows an individual to suspend searching for oneself while trying

different options. Erikson used this strategy himself during his youth as he traveled through Europe before committing himself to a career (Fleming, 2018). Diffusion is a coping strategy where an adolescent is indifferent to commitment and lacks passion. Two role identities or identity achievements: positive role identity or negative role identity are two other coping mechanisms for dealing with adolescent changes. Positive role identity is where individuals have a sense of knowing who they are and where their future lies while rebellious rejection of societal expectations represents negative role identity (Fleming, 2018). Behavior fluctuation was important to this study since the twelve co-researchers experienced behavior fluctuation as a part of adolescence and were trying to find social situations where they felt comfortable with their peers. Their moods may have impacted how they perceived their transition to high school was unfolding.

Social and Emotional Development

Social and emotional development includes the child's experience, expression, and management of emotions and the ability to establish positive and rewarding relationships with others ("Social-Emotional Development Domain—Child Development CA Dept of Education," 2018). In the early stages of adolescence, social and emotional sophistication is often slower to develop than physical and intellectual development. Young adults have a strong sense of needing to belong, especially with their peers. This peer approval becomes more important while adult approval diminishes in importance during this developmental time (Caskey & Anfara, 2014; Scales, 2010). Young adults often attempt new behaviors as they develop their personal identity and social standings with their peer group (Caskey & Anfara, 2014; Scales, 2010). This can cause adolescents to be divided with their desire to fit into a group and yet be unique and independent. Brighton (2007) noted that as young adults mature, they usually increase their circle of friends and may experience feelings of sexual

attractions with people within their peer group. Brighton (2007) stated that this can cause identity issues if their sexual attraction is with someone of the same sex.

Relationships: A need to belong. Juvonen (2006) found that adolescent students obtain their sense of belonging in school from awareness of the social climate of the school, and social relationships help students experience a sense of belonging. Once students have a sense of belonging in school it helps them adjust better to the multiple new stressors in their academic transition (Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger, & Dumas, 2003; Roybal, Thornton, & Usinger, 2014). Establishing friendships and having a sense of belonging is just as important in school as it is outside of school. Levett-Jones and Lathlean's (2009) study indicated that not having a sense of belonging can curb student motivation. One investigation in the year 2000 looked at the behaviors and motivation of seventh graders as they transitioned into ninth grade and adjusted to high school. I found that seventh grade behaviors and achievement was a reliable predictor of ninth grade behavior and achievement in the students I studied. I discovered that students who had more discipline issues, questioned the value of education, or had negative views of their teachers or fellow students tended to adapt poorly to the high school transition and had lower achievement in ninth grade (Murdock, Anderman, & Hodge 2000; Roybal et al., 2014).

Sense of belonging for minorities. The feeling of belonging has an even bigger impact on students who are minorities. When a student is a part of a racial majority, he or she has the opportunity to make more relationships and have a better chance of building more emotionally supportive relationships and friendships than students in a racial minority (Roybal et al., 2014; Vaquera & Kao, 2008). This is important to be aware of since students who do not have positive relationships with other students or teachers lack a sense of belonging and has shown to have a direct link to academic achievement (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Roybal et al., 2014). This PAR took place in Thailand, where Thai students are the

majority in the country and the Americans, Japanese, and Koreans are in the minority. The Americans in this study were both European-American and Asian-American students.

The role of teachers. Teachers have an important role in easing the transition from middle school to high school. Competent teachers and a healthy school climate have shown to be more important in addressing the transition for students from middle school to high school than the individual characteristics of the students themselves (Roybal et al., 2014). Caring and accommodating teachers are more likely to ease this difficult transition than more uncompromising and intimidating teachers (Roybal et al., 2014). Hattie (2009) found in a longitudinal study that adolescents' viewpoints of how caring their teachers were "predicted gains and losses in their feelings of self-esteem, school belonging and positive affect in school" (p. 230). In our modern highly mobile society, teachers are one of the last reliable sources of non-parental role models for adolescents. Teachers not only serve the role of educator, but they also can provide help and advice when academic or socio-emotional issues arise (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Roeser and Peck (2003) found that this role is critical to adolescent development when family and communities cannot provide this support. Eccles and Roeser (2011) discovered, and Deci and Ryan (2002) agreed, stating that students do better in an environment where their developmental, cultural, and psychological needs have been met.

Socio-Cultural Context for Transitions

Economic and political climates indirectly influence child development according to anthropological psychology. Li (2012) asserted that "[t]he local cultural customs, the caregiver's psychological characteristics, and the actual daily interactions are the more direct shaping force on the child" (p. 12). European-Americans, or the Western world, emphasizes human curiosity about the external world to inspire the acquisition of more knowledge and that learning give privilege to those with superior ability. In addition, the Western world

believes that the mind is the highest human faculty which enables humans to inquire about the world around them and that the spirit of inquiry into our surroundings leads to knowledge. European-Americans know their world through reason, and they tend to believe that the individual is the “sole entity for inquiring, discovery, and ultimate triumph” (Li, 2012, p. 15). Learning and knowledge is defined completely differently in the Confucius Heritage Culture (CHC) societies. Learning is not centered on the world around an individual, but to a person’s goal of striving to be their best and to become a better person morally and socially. In the Confucian intellectual tradition there are four major themes to learning, “perfect self, take the world upon oneself, learning virtues, and action is better than words” (Li, 2012, pp. 20-21). Li wrote that “If you follow the Western way of knowing and learning, it is unlikely that you will end at the Confucius way. Likewise, if you follow the Confucian approach, you will have little chance of landing in the Western approach” (p. 20). The forces behind the European-American and East Asian learning approaches come down to their cultural traditions.

Characteristics of Confucian Learning

Li (2012) stated that “Nowhere is competition for education as intense as in East Asia” (p. 65). A high priority is placed on education in Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) countries like China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, and Singapore. Confucius thought of the process of learning as “studying extensively, enquiring carefully, pondering thoroughly, sifting clearly and practicing earnestly” (Tan & Yates, 2010, p. 392, quoted in Lee, 1996, p. 35). High academic expectations are placed on students in East Asian cultures from their parents and teachers, which can lead to excessive stress (Tan & Yates, 2010). In CHC cultures, perceived stress from students comes mainly from two sources: from within since they have been raised to value hard work and have an earnestness for upward social mobility and from teachers/parents from whom students receive support to prevent them from

feeling the “exclusion and feelings of shame” (Zhang, Tze, Buhr, Klassen, & Daniels, 2016, p. 289; quoted in Ang & Huan, 2006, pp. 522–539).

Genshaft and Broyles stated that students of these nationalities report that academic problems are the most common cause of stress in adolescents—especially since they spend a substantial amount of time within school environments (as cited in Tan & Yates, 2010, p. 390). Buchmann and Dalton (2002) noted that the high academic expectations placed on adolescents in CHC countries have a direct impact on student academic achievement and helps to explain the high educational performance of Asian students when comparing them to White, Hispanic, and African-American students in the US. Interestingly, Li (2012) cited a study on Asian Americans’ in the *American Journal of Psychology* that indicates that students from CHC cultures suffer fewer mental health problems than European-Americans despite the intense academic pressure from their parents.

Cross-Cultural Characteristics

The physiological and psychological changes discussed earlier in this chapter are developmental changes that all adolescents experience. In addition to these developmental changes, children in school also experience pressure to achieve (Li, 2012). Earlier, I explained how the social experience and peer influence affects the transition from middle school to high school. In this next section of Chapter 2, I address the concept of filial piety, how Asian adolescents deal with stress, gender differences in the middle school to high school transition among the cultures of this project, the differences in Eastern and Western belief systems, and the socioeconomic status of the ISB.

Filial piety. In Confucian philosophy, there is a concept known a filial piety, which is a virtue of respect for one’s parents, elders and ancestors (Otto, 2016) and where “unconditional love and filial piety are mutually constructive” (Li, 2012, p. 38). This philosophy began in China and subsequently spread to Japan, Korea, and Vietnam where it

heavily influences parenting in these cultures. Kim and Hong noted that children are taught how to act and conduct themselves towards their parents, adults, and their ancestors (as cited in Otto, 2016, p. 168). There is also an East Asian concept of *chaio shun*, which emphasizes balanced family relationships (Dewar, 2018). Parents who follow this philosophy believe that their children should be trained by the age of five to have appropriate behaviors and that their children can improve in almost every situation through hard work and effort (Otto, 2016). This philosophy that children can improve in almost every situation through hard work and effort can be quite stressful when it comes to school. Working harder and applying more effort often takes more time, which can take students away from things they enjoy. This added pressure of working harder and longer might also be incredibly frustrating if an adolescent has a learning disability or is learning in a second or third language like several students in an international education setting.

Academic stress in Asian cultures. Culture plays a large role in how students adjust with their transition from middle school to high school. In Japan, the public in each local area rank high schools on their perceived academic quality. Entrance into a good high school is considered the initial step in obtaining a successful career (Koizumi, 1995). White (1988) wrote that in addition to the priority that is placed on academics in Japan, both harmony and cooperation are also valued. Harmony is maintained in Japanese classrooms by having each student have similar educational experiences while keeping differences among students to a minimum (Koizumi, 1995).

In Japanese junior high schools, students have very strict rules that they have to follow based upon their physical appearance—much like in a private international school. One major difference is that teachers can mandate how a student spends their private time at home in Japanese schools. The restrictive nature of Japanese schools has an impact on adolescents and how they view themselves (Koizumi, 1995).

Optimism scores are higher at the middle of ninth grade than the middle of eighth grade for Japanese students. This is due to middle school students worrying about the harder work that faces them once they enter ninth grade and the stress involved in taking entrance exams for high school (Koizumi, 1995). Academic stress is one of two most severe types of stress encountered by Japanese middle school students—along with interpersonal relationships with their peers. White (1993) wrote that Japanese adolescents appear to be very cognizant of their emerging sense of self and the demands of belonging to a group; while Matsuyama mentioned the overall mental health of middle school students in Japan is related to school atmosphere, discipline, how much they enjoy learning, and the relationships they have with their friends (as cited in Koizumi, 1995, p. 424). Students who have more social support from their friends adjust to school transitions easier and have a more positive outlook on their future (Tsuzuki, 2012).

Gender differences. Stipek found that gender differences do appear in middle school between Japanese girls and boys, with girls being less self-confident and showing lower expectations for being successful than boys (as cited in Koizumi, 1995, p. 425). However, one longitudinal study by Tsuzuki (2012) found that both sexes have a reduction in hope for the future as they advance to higher grades. Roberts, Sarigiani, Petersen, and Newman (1990) have shown that girls are more vulnerable when transitioning between schools than boys. Zhang et al. (2016) found that there were no gender differences between male and female Korean students in perceived stress in a study they did in South Korea.

Boys and girls experience stress differently in adolescence, and it may be related to psychological symptoms and disorder. Compas, Orasan, and Grant (1993) cited a study by Peterson and colleagues (1991) that found adolescent girls experienced more stressful and challenging events than adolescent boys, which accounted for gender differences in depressed mood. School transitions made near the onset of puberty and feminine biological

changes made transitioning to school more difficult for girls and often led to increases in depressed mood. According to Compas et al. (1993), “girls in early adolescence have reported more social family, peer, intimacy and social network stressors than boys, and they perceived these events as more stressful than boys” (p. 338) while in mid-adolescence intimacy and network stressors were more common in girls than in boys. Suldo and Shaunessy-Dedrick (2013) found “that girls experience greater stress and internalizing symptoms of mental health problems before and after the transition to high school” (p. 213). Suldo and Shaunessy-Dedrick (2013) cited prior research from Wiklund et al. (2012) on gender differences in perceived stress agreeing with their finding.

Differences in East and West belief systems. Li (2012) cited cultural differences in competition. Fülöp (2000) studied Japanese, American, and Hungarian students and how they perceived academic competition. She found that the Japanese reported the most competition in school, but they experienced this in positive manner and saw the competition as “exercising their will power, self-evaluation, and joy” (Li, 2012, p. 211). American students felt the most stress in this study and disliked losing the most and while experiencing the most conflict. However, the Americans did state that the competition caused them to push themselves to do their best work. Fülöp (2000) concluded that Japanese students use competition to motivate each other and also to help each other to improve. Rivals for them are seen as friends and cooperation is high enabling the group to improve as a whole. Americans saw students as rivals and someone to win against causing the cooperation between Americans to be low (Li, 2012).

South Korean society is a Confucian Heritage Culture that places a huge emphasis on hard work and education along with venerating educational status and hierarchy (“NCEE | South Korea Overview,” 2017). Kim (2002) stated that the South Korean education system

strives for an egalitarian approach where there is equal opportunity for students regardless of their gender, religion, or socioeconomic status.

Blazer (2012) wrote despite this equal opportunity approach to education in South Korea, the educational system is extremely competitive, highly pressurized, and test-driven. This educational environment creates a culture where college entrance exams and the university in which a student attends significantly impact their future opportunities in life ranging from career prospects, marital prospects, and overall social prestige (“NCEE | South Korea Overview,” 2017).

Kim and Lee (2010) stated that typically 75% of all secondary school students participate in supplementary classes after a full day of schooling to prepare them for university entrance exams. Blazer (2012) stated that students are pushed both physically and emotionally in these privately-run supplementary classes, often finishing their studies well beyond midnight. Admission into Korean universities and academic success is reliant on a family’s ability to afford this supplemental education. These Korean young adults are aware of the financial pressure their studies place on their parents and their failure is also a reflection on their parents based upon the filial piety culture. This causes complications in family relationships and adds additional pressure to the students to perform (VanderGast, Foxx, Flowers, Rouse, & Decker, 2015). Lee, Puig, Kim, Shin, Lee, and Lee (2010) acknowledged that 56.5% of Korean adolescents experience stress due to academic related concerns. Lee et al. (2010) showed that significant mental health concerns developed out of the academic-related stressors, which has led to more instances of bullying, exposure to violence, life stressors, and trouble balancing family traditions.

In the US, there is a conviction that anyone can and should go to university. The 2002 Education Longitudinal Survey noted that just over 90% of all tenth graders surveyed expected to attend university. In the US, roughly 50% of all Asians have at least a bachelor’s

degree while 30% of non-Hispanic Whites, 17% of Blacks, and 11% of Hispanics do (Lowman & Elliott, 2009). Racial groups vary in how they typically set their educational expectations as well as how those expectations change over time. Hispanics and Black males have higher expectations than non-Hispanic White males but are less likely to sustain these expectations over time (Lowman & Elliott, 2009). Hao and Bonstead-Bruns (1998) found that Asian immigrants and children of Asian immigrants usually have very high educational expectations, as you would expect from Confucian Heritage Culture countries.

In the US, there are two central beliefs in the educational system—the first one is that social mobility is accomplished through education, and the second is that entry into school and credentials are allocated on the basis of worthiness (Masi et al., 1998). Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) contended that high school students' future opportunities have less to do with merit, but more to do with the occupations of their parents (as cited in Lowman & Elliott 2009).

Socioeconomic status and the ISB. The ISB has an annual tuition of 909,000 Baht (“Fees—International School Bangkok,” 2017) which at the time of this writing is \$26,424.42. Expatriate Americans living in Bangkok usually have their children's tuition paid for by the company they work for or by the U.S. State Department—if the parent works for the U.S. Embassy. This high cost of education can place a lot of pressure on students to perform, much like their Korean counterparts.

The socioeconomic status of American parents has been found to have a positive correlation on the educational expectations placed on American youths along with the stress they feel to succeed. This is especially true if the parents have a strong educational background (Hanson, 1994; Lowman & Elliott, 2009). Hossler and Stage (1992) wrote that the combined educational status of parents has been shown determine both student and parent academic expectations for adolescents. Even if only one parent has a bachelor's degree their

children are more likely to apply to university than those children who do not have a college educated parent (Lowman & Elliott, 2009). Studies by Cahalan et al. (2006) have shown that parents with higher socioeconomic status in all racial groups are more likely to encourage their children to attend university regardless of how well their child is doing in school (Lowman & Elliott, 2009). All of the American parents with children at the ISB either are college educated or have considerable wealth. This is also true for the Thai community, which does not fall under the Confucian Heritage Culture. These higher expectations can lead to more stress when making the transition from middle school to high school.

Bryk and Raudenbush (1986) along with March (1991) noted that there is a direct relationship between socioeconomic status and student expectations and achievement. Neighborhood socioeconomic status has also been linked to higher student educational expectations and academic performance (Ainsworth, 2002; Lowman & Elliott, 2009). The best-known school level indicator of student educational expectations comes down to school type. Coleman and Hoffer stated that private schools tend to have greater educational expectations than students in public schools in the US (as cited in Lowman & Elliott, 2009, p. 81). Bryk, Lee, and Holland found that the curricula in private schools is focused more on core academics, and these schools create a strong sense of community within their schools, which helps to generate more parental involvement (as cited in Lowman & Elliott, 2009, p. 81). The unique attributes of private schools help to integrate students from a variety of family backgrounds into school cultures that have high academic expectations and educational achievement (Lowman & Elliott, 2009).

The ISB is a school located in a wealthy community, Nichada Thani, and is a private non-profit school. There are considerable academic expectations at the ISB in the American community and the overall community as a whole. These higher expectations can make the

transition from middle school to high school more stressful since there is an urgency to perform at a high level. This is also true in the Thai community.

The research that I was able to find on Thai culture and education really does not apply to the Thai students at the ISB. Thailand established an education system that follows a Western model that has separated the Buddhist religion from education. Unfortunately, Thailand has not been successful in educating the public as a whole and has been unable to provide an equal opportunity for everyone to receive an education (Dhammapitaka, n.d.). For the purpose of my literature review, I consider the expectations of Thai students to be similar to the American students and assume they were not of Thai-Chinese descent.

Shifting Academic Demands

Coleman (1988) stated that success academically in the transition to high school is more likely to happen to students who have formed friendships in the school and who experience a connection with their school (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001; Langenkamp, 2009). The academic demands have different elements that include quantity and quality of work coupled with teacher and parent expectations.

Quantity and Quality

Academically coursework tends to get more difficult as the quantity of schoolwork and the demands for quality both increase. Alspaugh (1998) wrote that many students suffer a loss in academic achievement when transitioning from eighth to ninth grade because they cannot keep up with the demands. In addition, Eccles and Roeser (2011) suggested that the learning environments that students experience in high school are less supportive and that only the highest achieving adolescents are motivated as they progress through school.

The push for quality, often reflected by higher grades, is one major indicator of academic attainment, and that push is evidenced in the grade point average (GPA). Isakson and Jarvis (1999) noted that GPA decreased markedly between the end of eighth grade and

the end of ninth grade. GPA is a good indicator of how well a student is adjusting to a new school environment and how well they understand the expectations of their new teachers (Langenkamp, 2009; Schiller, 1999). An inverse relationship has been observed between the number of stressors in a student's life and GPA; the more stressors a student had, the lower the GPA (Roybal et al., 2014). This drop in GPA is typically temporary for students who are not considered at-risk (Catterall, 1998; Langenkamp, 2009).

Parent and Teacher Expectations

Teachers and parents tend to put more responsibility on the adolescent to learn once they reach high school (Ellerbrock, Denmon, Owens, & Lindstrom, 2015). However, several studies demonstrate that certain types of parent involvement could benefit children's academic achievement and emotional development (Froiland, Peterson, & Davison, 2013). Involvement between a parent and child evolves over time, with certain parental behaviors being more important at different stages than in others. For example, parent-child mutual reading, playing with puzzles, counting items, and having access to books at home predict improvement in early academic skills (Froiland, Powell, Diamond, & Son, 2013). Direct parental involvement in academics can have a negative effect once a child reaches middle school and high school. Froiland, Powell, Diamond, and Son (2013) found that parents checking their child's grades, helping them with homework, and checking homework actually had a negative impact on student achievement, especially in eighth grade. The reason behind this is thought to be the adolescent urge to have more autonomy, which means that students find this parental involvement controlling (Froiland, 2011). Froiland and Oros (2013) found that controlling parents repress intrinsic motivation to learn, which is critical for the advancement of adolescents' achievement.

Parental expectations for their children's long-term educational achievement have an important affirmative effect on the academic development and performance of adolescents

(Froiland & Davison, 2014). The general expectation from parents at the ISB is that their child will achieve good grades and gain acceptance into a major university. In middle school, grade performance does not count towards university acceptance. This changes once a student reaches ninth grade since universities' admission officers consider the ninth through twelfth grade academic transcript. The emphasis on performance now adds a layer of stress that was not present in middle school. Parental expectations increase, placing pressure on their children to achieve at the highest level possible, while they are adjusting to a difficult social and emotional transition in life. Froiland and Davison (2014) cited a study by Bandura et al. (2001), which indicated that high parental academic expectations in middle school predicted academic success in high school. High school teachers in an International Baccalaureate (IB) school, like the ISB, experience pressure to use ninth and tenth grade as preparation for the IB Diploma Programme in eleventh and twelfth grade. The IB Diploma Programme is a rigorous and balanced two-year program that prepares students for success in university and life beyond. High school teachers also experience pressure to have IB scores that are above the world average, which means they place additional pressure on their students to be successful since consistent poor performance could lead to termination of their job.

Preparing students for the IB Diploma Programme, along with students adjusting to more work and assessments, higher parental and teacher expectations, while dealing with the social and emotional changes in their lives makes this an incredibly difficult time in adolescents' lives. I was curious to see how my twelve co-researchers dealt with these added pressures, and I hoped to find ways to ease this stressful transition I was also interested in learning whether there were any academic and cultural difficulties with the transition from middle school to high school at the ISB.

Complexities of Transitions

School is a place where adolescents spend most of their time in classrooms, have time with their friends, are exposed to norms of their culture, and engage in extracurricular activities all of which shape their identity and prepare for them for their futures. During this time of life, the only activity on which adolescents spend more time is sleeping (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roeser, and Davis-Kean found as a result of this time division, school has an enormous impact on every aspect of development including adolescents' intellectual achievement, psychological well-being, and peer interactions (as cited in Eccles & Roeser, 2011, p. 233). Students in this age group have experiences that vary from incredibly positive and enjoyable to those who endure stress and manage challenges the best they can to students who are completely turned off by the experience and find it difficult to see any benefit to learning (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). In this section, I describe and define transition and examine the stress that can result from transition itself and how high schools have different expectations for young adults and tend to offer less support than more.

Transition as a Process, Not an Event / Stresses of Transitions

The definition of school transitions is “a process during which institutional and social factors influence which students' educational careers are positively or negatively affected by this movement between organizations (Ellerbrock et al., 2015; Schiller, 1999, pp. 216—217). Barber and Olsen (2004) named the transition from middle to high school as an influential and demanding transition; this transition is referred to as “one of the defining parameters of development in the second decade of life” and “the most difficult transition point in education” (Southern Regional Education Board [SREB], 2002, p. 24). Students who make a successful transition from middle school to high school are more likely to handle challenges that they encounter later in high school with more ease (Langenkamp, 2009).

There is more to the transition to high school than a moving to a different building. Wilcox (2007) stated it involves an extensive range of “physical, emotional, educational and perceptual issues, which to date have been inadequately addressed” (p. 28). It is important to realize, as Hertzog, Morgan, and Borland wrote, that “the transition to high school is a process, not a single event, which unfolds over time and across schools” (as cited in Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013, p. 174), and many of those transitions cause stress and anxiety.

It is understood that everyone is exposed to stressful situations at the societal, community, and interpersonal level (Schneiderman, Ironson, & Siegel, 2005). Lazarus and Folkman defined stress as how a person perceives whether or not they have the ability to handle a certain situation from the past, present, or future (as cited in Tan & Yates, 2010, p. 391). Stress is an inescapable feature of human development and is prevalent in adolescence. According to Compas et al. (1993), “Stressful experiences of both an acute and a chronic nature are important in the course of normal as well as disrupted development during adolescence” (p. 331). Every adolescent will be exposed to some level of generic stress throughout development. These stressors include normal daily stress as well as dealing with major events like transitioning to a new school. In addition to the normal daily stresses associated with adolescence, a smaller group will encounter more severe stressful events like loss of a loved one, serious injury, a death in the family, or parental divorce. These events cause a great deal of upheaval in an adolescent’s life but only affect a small portion of adolescents (Compas et al., 1993).

In this discussion, I explain the ways in which different persons respond to stress, how the multiple transitions in a student’s life cause compound stress for some, the most common results of aggravated stress, and introduce the stage environment theory as a way of understanding adolescent transitions. How a person handles stress is important, especially in academics where students are asked to grapple with bigger workloads as they transition into

harder grades and subjects. Jones (1993) found this increased workload leads to more self-doubt generated by an individual and the fear of failure increases. According to Suldo and Shaunessy-Dedrick (2013):

Students who transition from middle school to an accelerated high school curriculum, such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma program, may face additional academic challenges than peers pursuing a typical high school curriculum, particularly with respect to performance expectations in multiple advanced classes, preparation for end-of-course exams, and service to the community, all of which are components of IB.” (p. 196)

Suldo and Shaunessy-Dedrick (2013) found in IB and general education programs that IB high school students experienced significantly more stress than their peers in general education. This stress was evident in ninth grade despite the IB Diploma program starting in eleventh grade. Their research reported that students entering an IB high school perceive more stress than students going into a general education high school. Increased competition for acceptance to university along with pressure to produce high scores on standardized tests for university admission has caused high school to be more stressful for adolescents (Suldo & Shaunessy-Dedrick, 2013). Despite increased stress experienced by IB high school students, interestingly, they did not show “elevated anxious, depressive, and/or somatic symptoms of psychopathology” (Suldo & Shaunessy-Dedrick, 2013, p. 212) when compared to general education high school students.

Stress can be compounded by multiple transitions and the ways those institutions do not fully respond to the developmental needs of the student. Felner, Favazza, Shim, Brand, Gu, and Noonan (2001) found as a student progresses from kindergarten to high school, his or her schooling often becomes more impersonal and sadly, more developmentally unresponsive. Middle schools have different expectations, environments, structures, and cultures than high schools. High schools tend to be larger than middle schools, and the way students are taught can be quite different as teachers act more autonomously. This larger,

more complex environment may not be receptive to the developmental needs of adolescents (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013). Eccles and Roeser (2011) found their developmental needs for increased psychological or behavioral freedom, involvement with their peers, and making connections with non-familial adults are often at odds with the less personal, more controlling essence of high school. These differences can cause ninth graders to feel a lack of intimacy and connectedness when they enter high school (Roybal et al., 2014). Roderick (2003) found that their friendships are renegotiated with the changing of schools, and this causes either new opportunities for socializing or it can worsen student vulnerabilities if they enter high school with very little social support.

Unfortunately, this change of schools can produce undesirable outcomes like truancy, lower grades, diminished confidence, and a decrease in motivation along with a rise in disciplinary issues (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). There are potential positive effects in this transition for students like making new friends, more freedom, courses that are more specialized, and an increase in after school activities.

International Movement

Globalization of industry and education has expanded the number of families traveling around the world (McLachlan, 2008). Helping students new to an international school deal with the adjustment to a new school and culture are major issues for school counselors, teachers, parents, and school administrators (Schwarzberg & Parenteau, 2004). Several factors can impact an adolescent's adjustment to a move like "age and gender of the child, personality of the child, the nature and frequency of moves, the reason for the move, socioeconomic status, level of support from parents, schools, and sponsoring organization" (McLachlan, 2008, pp. 93–94). The long-term effects of international moving on children is not well studied at the moment, but moving does result in a change of school, change in lifestyle, and loss of friends, which can be stressful for adolescents (McLachlan, 2008).

Schwarzberg and Parenteau (2004) investigated whether the number of moves a student had experienced affected their social adaptation and academic achievement when compared to students who had only studied at an international school in Argentina. They found that international mobility did not affect academic achievement, but it did negatively affect social adaptation. Students who had not experienced a move were the best adapted while first time movers had significant issues with their social and emotional well-being (Schwarzberg & Parenteau, 2004). Their study further reported that students who had experienced two or more moves did not differ significantly from students with no moves indicating, “students acquire adaptive capabilities and resiliency in their second international move” (Schwarzberg & Parenteau, 2004, p. 35).

Stage-environment fit theory proposes that the environment of a school plays an important role in supporting students as they transition from middle school to high school. The theory states that adolescents whose environments change in developmentally regressive ways are more likely to experience difficulties, while adolescents whose social environments respond to their developing needs are more likely to experience beneficial results (Gutman & Eccles, 2007). The “organizational, social, and instructional processes in schools change” (Lerner, Steinberg, & Eccles, 2004, p. 127) as children advance from elementary school to high school. When using stage-environment fit theory to analyze the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade, adolescents often experience a discrepancy between their needs and their new high school environment. Transitioning to this traditionally more organized, more complex, and larger school can create a detachment between what the school has to offer and the needs of the student. Eccles and Midgley found that this discrepancy to potentially impact negatively the motivation and commitment of the young adult (as cited in Ellerbrock et al., 2015, p. 84). Ellerbrock et al. (2015) quoted Eccles (2004), writing, “schools need to change in developmentally appropriate ways if they are to provide the kind of social context that will

continue to motivate students' interest and engagement as the students mature" (pp. 125-126). Eccles (1999) stated the basics and developmental needs of a young adult accentuate the importance of a school environment that cultivates a safe and comfortable environment, which is essential for healthy adolescent development.

High school offers increased freedom and responsibility and is more unstructured than middle school. The unstructured aspects of high school may be somewhat insensitive to the needs of the transitioning students (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Interestingly, students who expressed having less autonomy at the end of middle school fared better than those students who had more freedom at home (Roybal et al., 2014). Yet, because of the many transition issues that may cause stress or anxiety, students new to high school need time to figure out new norms, values, and behaviors associated with their new school and the culture of their peers. They do not need to figure this out alone or with peers; they need adults and the school structures to support them. This PAR examined the experiences of students transitioning to high school to determine just what educators need to do in an international school to support them and their peers in the consequential time of moving from middle school to high school.

Conclusion

The transition from middle school to high school is one that is highly complex due to the emotional, physical, educational, and perceptual issues students face during this time. There is a tremendous change that happens physically, psychologically, socially, and emotionally during this time due to puberty. The physical change of moving from one educational setting to another is also stressful and impersonal. On top of all these changes, there is an academic jump in difficulty that coincides with students being more distant with their studies. Cultural aspects—like the Confucian Heritage Culture for Koreans and Japanese, and the higher expectations of parents who are well educated or come from wealth—affect this change. As Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2013) quoted Hertzog et al. (2009)

earlier in this chapter, “the transition to high school is a process, not a single event, which unfolds over time and across schools” (p. 86). This is evident after conducting research, but more research is necessary to understand this transition—especially in a private international school setting.

Key Findings

The key findings that influence this PAR are the physiological and cognitive, psychological changes and challenges, shifting academic demands, complexities of transitions, and the socio-cultural context of the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade. Figure 5 provides an example of how these factors build on each other and affect each other. As adolescents enter puberty, they experience several physiological, cognitive, and psychological changes, and with these new experiences, they encounter challenges. Puberty usually has happened before students enter ninth grade, so these events are the initial events that cause this transition to be challenging. As children enter ninth grade, there are different academic pressures placed on them. As I discussed in detail earlier in this chapter, students encounter more homework, more assessments in a short period of time, and teachers who are more demanding. Students have the additional pressure of their grades counting towards university admission, and in the case of the ISB, a new grading system. These physiological, psychological, and academic changes all contribute to the complexity of the transition. The transition is handled differently by different cultures and by students in different socio-economic situations. Students of Korean and Japanese backgrounds encounter more stress during this time, just like their American and Thai peers, but they handle this stress better. Students from high socio-economic backgrounds tend to have higher expectations placed on them from these parents, and they face more pressure from home to be successful. In this PAR, I focused on five factors over the course of three action research cycles and present my

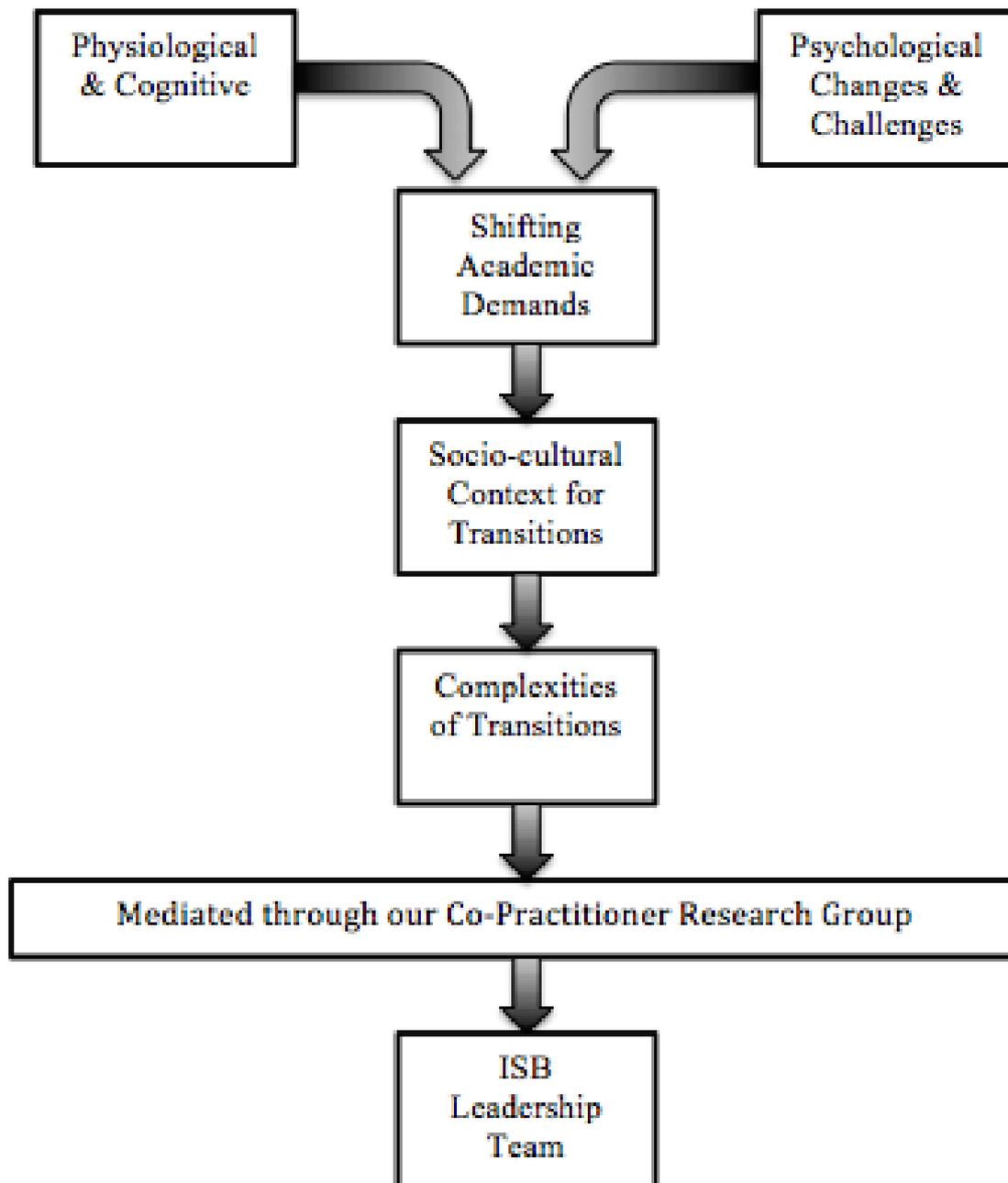


Figure 5. Framework diagram for action research project.

suggestions on how the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade can be improved to be more accommodating for students of the four largest nationalities.

Limitations

The literature examined the general psychological, and socio-cultural factors affecting middle school to high school transitions. However, the specifics of how these factors affect transnational students at an international school are not completely clear. While researchers know there are differences in cultures and approaches to education and parent-student relationships, precisely what I might expect in the context of this PAR is unknown. The results of this PAR focus on four nationalities, which may not be useful to other international schools that do not have a similar student population but may add to the literature on moving to understand the middle to high school transitions in international schools. Different cultures may find the transition different based on their culture and the culture of their school.

Connections to Chapters 3

In Chapter 3, I introduce the settings and demographics of the PAR, which is the ISB. I discuss my own personal academic transitions and how my experiences influenced this research. Additionally, I also write about the history of schooling and how the middle school to high school transition has developed over time. The political environment of the ISB is examined, including the ways it may affect the PAR. The decision-making process at the ISB and the leadership structure are explained, along with the counseling departments involved with the eighth and ninth grade transition. Several challenges exist at the ISB that make this research potentially difficult, ranging from rightsizing of staff, communication issues, curriculum alignment, new grading systems, and a new Advisory program. Intercultural and transnational differences are explained in Chapter 3, at which time, I also describe my role as an action researcher and the benefits and risks of doing such research.

CHAPTER 3: CONTEXT FOR THE FoP

Introduction

As previously outlined, the aim of this PAR was to engage twelve students in an examination of the physiological, psychological, and socio-cultural factors related to the transition from middle school to high school, so this transition can be better understood, and so changes can be suggested to ease the transition in future classes at the ISB. I investigated how transnational students at this international school experience the psychological and socio-cultural transitions from middle school to high school.

In this chapter, I introduce the research location, which is the International School Bangkok (ISB). I describe the basic demographics of the students and the ISB's status as a private school. In addition, I provide an overview of the ISB's history as it grew from a kindergarten to an eighth-grade school to a high school and then finally to a kindergarten to a fifth grade, a middle school, and a high school. The ISB is an age-graded organization, which provides "normal living for each child in a group representing the whole range of achievement, background, and ability for a given age" (Christensen, 1960, p. 76). The cut-off points because of age grading as a grammar of schooling is significant, and, indeed, never quite works for all students because young people develop differently, and it is impossible for a school that is age-graded to fully accommodate adolescents and their transitions (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The historical aspect of the middle school to high school transition currently has a strong effect on my project because there seems to be a large shift between middle school and high school that presents some ninth graders with challenges. Next, I discuss the political/micropolitical environment at the ISB, which affects this project in these key ways: teachers not following the assigned academic curriculum without facing consequences, teachers afraid to question the transition due to it potentially affecting their job security, and the school being reluctant to change due to financial issues it is currently facing. Finally, I

consider my role in this inquiry, the assets I brought to this analysis, and how I worked with my CPRs.

Settings and Demographics

The setting for my inquiry was the ISB, which is located currently on the outskirts of Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand, with a population of 8.28 million according to the 2010 census (“Bangkok Population 2018,” 2018). The ISB is a private, nonprofit school, which was founded in 1951 and originally called the International Children’s Center (H. Albert, personal communication, May 25, 2017). This school started with a group of 50 students, all of whom were the children of American diplomats or United Nations workers. In 1957, the school changed its name to the ISB, and a group of six seniors participated in the first graduating class (H. Albert, personal communication, May 25, 2017). In 1960, the ISB moved from the U.S. Embassy grounds to a larger campus on Soi Sukhumvit 15 and in 1992 to its current location in the gated community of Nichada Thani in Pakkret—north of Bangkok (Davies, n.d.).

Freire (2016) wrote that “human beings *are* because they *are in* a situation” (p. 109). The gated community of Nichada Thani plays a significant role in the overall atmosphere of the school. Several people at the ISB refer to this gated community as “the bubble” since it has perfectly manicured landscaping, sidewalks, and nice roads, which people frequently, jog and cycle, or drive their golf carts on. It is far cry from the town of Pakkret just outside the gated community, with its noise, traffic, vendors, motorbike taxis, massage parlors, and Soi dogs (Memo, April 7, 2017). This gated living community causes people to be avoidant since this type of living is not normal. People go to the same store to shop, have coffee at the same Starbucks, live in the same building, and work in the same school (J. Isabella, personal communication, May 18, 2017). It causes parents to be disconnected and not involved in school events, or as one counselor put it, “it feels a lot like the States” (M. Hughes, personal

communication, May 19, 2017). This environment creates a sense of isolation and people have a need for more space, which creates a weird social dynamic where people do not want to socialize since they always see the same people, although it does not seem to affect the students as much (J. Isabella, personal communication, May 18, 2017).

This setting has helped to create an environment that is not welcoming for new teachers to the school. Often, seasoned ISB teachers ignore newcomers they pass in halls, despite offered hellos, which is part of the divide between newcomers and seasoned staff. According to a counselor who is familiar with the division, “A lot of water has passed under the bridge for staff who have been here for a while” (M. Hughes, personal communication, May 19, 2017). There are teachers at the ISB teaching what they want and not the prescribed curriculum. Several teachers are paid a lot of money and are set in their ways creating an environment of “working to live instead of living to work” (M. Hughes, personal communication, May 19, 2017). There are very few social functions where teachers can mingle, and teachers can go years without seeing other colleagues at work due to the social isolation of the divisions and the intensity of the workload. As one counselor succinctly put it, “it’s a different place, isn’t it?” (J. Isabella, personal communication, May 18, 2017).

The social culture of students at the ISB is generally positive, warm, and accepting, which is best summed up as, “it is cool to be clever and smart” (P. Silas, personal communication, May 23, 2017). The school has numerous adolescents and is not perfect since bullying and mistreatment of students does happen (P. Silas, personal communication, May 23, 2017). The ISB is a private school, and as such, caters to a certain economic class since families have to pay for their children attend. The annual tuition at the ISB is close to \$26,000 (“Fees—International School Bangkok,” 2017) while the average annual income of a Thai is \$4800 (“Thailand Average Monthly Wages | 2018 | Data | Chart | Calendar | Forecast,” 2018). The school does provide educational support for a wide variety of learners

and is an inclusive school that offers an intensive needs program, if the parents can afford tuition.

Because the student population is close to 2,000 students and consists of over 60 nationalities, that means teachers and administrators are dealing with different cultural traditions in addition to ages and developmental differences, the transition challenges from middle to high school have another level of complexity. For my investigation, I followed a small population of twelve students who transitioned to high school in the Fall 2017. When they were in eighth grade (school year 2016-17), there were currently 153 students from twenty-eight nationalities. Participants were from four nationalities: American, Thai, Japanese, and Korean. These four nationalities represented the largest nationality groups in the school.

The Thai community at the ISB is from the wealthiest families in Thailand. Levels of family wealth create a social class ranking within the school among Thai students (J. Isabella, personal communication, May 18, 2017). One middle school counselor mentioned that the ISB is essentially a rich Thai private school that expatriates attend (M. Hughes, personal communication, May 19, 2017). One high school counselor found the Thai parent community to be very cold, formal, and transactional with no interest in building relationships (Memo, May 18, 2017). Another counselor mentioned in an interview that 99% of the contact from the Thai community comes when they need something (M. Hughes, personal communication, May 19, 2017). Thai parental expectations are for their children to go to a top university somewhere in the world (J. Isabella, personal communication, May 18, 2017). They often bring gifts to the counselors wanting something in return to help their child get into university. Competition for grades from kindergarten to twelfth grade is widespread, and this competition stems from the home culture since it is very difficult to gain acceptance into the

ISB as a Thai; this competition permeates throughout the fabric of the school (J. Isabella, personal communication, May 18, 2017).

The other cultures at the ISB form reciprocal relationships that are genuine (Memo, May 18, 2017). The non-Thai student population tends to come from the children of U.S. State Department workers and international corporations. The ISB is a driven school with an intense academic culture where “only excellence matters” (P. Silas, personal communication, May 23, 2017). This intensity comes from the parents of the children attending the ISB since they are highly educated and come from a non-diverse socioeconomic background (P. Silas, personal communication, May 23, 2017).

The PAR addressed the question of equity by analyzing how different nationalities are affected by the transition from eighth grade to high school. Along with looking at different nationalities, I had an opportunity to see how gender affected by this transition.

In summary, this large international school is the setting of this project, and I worked with twelve multinational middle school students, three high school counselors, and an eighth-grade counselor as I studied these twelve students’ transition into high school. Understanding the attributes of my context as a student as well as the general history of education informs how I thought about the transitions the students were facing.

History: Self, Organization

In this section, I provide a brief history of my transitions, and analyzing those offers one contextual factor for the PAR; my own reflections and analysis act as a touchstone for me in understanding the students’ experiences. Then, I examine the history of schools and how these grade level transitions became embedded in the way my colleagues and I “do” school. Finally, I look at the history of this school as it provides a deeper background for how the school emerged as a leading international school in Thailand.

Transitions of an Action Researcher: My Story as a Context Factor

Robin Sharma (2014), a Canadian writer and leadership speaker, once tweeted that “All change is hard at first, messy in the middle, and so gorgeous in the end”. From my own personal educational journey, I have experienced transitions that were hard, some that were messy, and in the end some that were indeed gorgeous. Through my experiences I have been able to advise many students through their own difficult transitions. As a key part of this project, I hope to understand more deeply the dimensions—the hard, the messy, and the gorgeous—of the student at the ISB as they transition from middle school to high school. As an educator, I wonder how my students are dealing with their transitions through school (Memo, May 21, 2017). While I too went through this transition many years ago, the students I teach are vastly different culturally and socially than what I experienced. Even though I went through similar physical and emotional changes, they seem to face more stressors than I did when I was their age. These students live in a more complicated world, and their transition to high school seems more complex (Dunn, 2014) than what I experienced. They live in a much different era than I did and go to a world-renowned private international school, where I did not. There is significant academic pressure at the ISB to do well. When I was in school, there was no social pressure to do well in school and to go to a top university. These young adults live in a digital age that is far removed from the environment in which I grew up and live in a multicultural environment foreign to life I experienced. The students have a digital identity where they can experience cyber bullying along with physical bullying at school. When I was their age, there was only physical bullying to worry about. My world at their age was literally black and white. There were no other races at my school, while students at the ISB encounter cultures from all over the world. The students I encounter on a daily basis are worldlier than I was in my late twenties.

Even though I did not grow up in the digital age and did not attend a prestigious international school, I do have experiences that are relevant to the students at the ISB. Despite the differences in experiences (e.g., my adolescent years were not so busy), I have lived through the social and emotional changes these students are encountering and the academic stress of facing more challenging classes. I have also been a teacher and advisor to students in this transitioning age group at the ISB and have heard firsthand how challenging transitioning to high school can be. I know we have shared similar academic and social-emotional challenges though this transition in life. The differences in our experiences have made me a better observer of what these students are experiencing and has allowed me to see more clearly the additional stressors placed on these adolescents' lives.

Here is where the messy part of my academic transition started. For the first time, I was being bussed to school. I recall the trepidation I had waiting for bus 667 to pull up and take me to North East junior high school. I remember where I sat on the bus and who ultimately sat beside me, a nice girl with whom I went to church. I remember seeing acid washed jeans, heavy metal t-shirts, and African American students for the first time in my life. My classes were now large and in my last lesson I remember the teacher playing a name game, and I wound up being the person who was supposed to remember every student's name in the class. What a terrifying and messy transition to middle school. As an adult, I tend to forget how traumatic this experience was for me, and it makes me wonder what difficulties my own students are having with their transitions at the ISB (Memo, May 21, 2017).

While this transition to public school was the best move for me socially, it did take its toll on me academically since I was not tested for course selection until I reached ninth grade. During this time, I saw first-hand how poor children and minority students, who did not perform well in school, were placed with less skilled teachers. It was not until I reached ninth grade that I was in academically challenging classes, and, for the first time, I started to think

about going to university. Luckily the students at the ISB receive academic testing upon admission and are placed in academic appropriate classes, unlike what I experienced in junior high school.

In high school, I was an above average student who was bored and missed quite a bit of school. Not until I reached university did I finally experience a gorgeous academic transition. While in university I developed a strong interest in mathematics and science, which ultimately led me to a career in education as a physics teacher.

Based on these experiences, I can see that some attributes of what I experienced became a way I now define the major goals of schooling as providing a child the opportunity to learn, to be challenged in a rigorous academic environment, to show his or her creative side, to develop critical thinking skills, to become literate with technology, and to allow them to focus on interests and strengths. Schooling should provide a safe, equitable environment where each child has the ability to find success with their individual talents and allows them to be aware of their role in society and become a global citizen. Ultimately schooling should play a strong role in the local community where parents think they can be involved in the school and school activities (Halsey, 2004). In essence, even though I did experience the same expectation stress, through my schooling I was able to become this person: challenged to do well, creative, critical thinker, technology-savvy, and pursuing my interests. That is the gorgeous ending that I want for all the students I teach.

The ISB is a school that embodies the aspect of schooling in which I believe. There is a strong local community at the school and the facilities are world class. Students have access to numerous subjects that have faced budget cuts in the US, like art, physical education, and theater, while also having access to rigorous courses in the traditional subjects of English, foreign languages, humanities, mathematics, and science. The ISB is also a school that offers the IB Diploma Programme, which is a rigorous college preparatory program that helps

students to develop into inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who are motivated to succeed (Baccalaureate®, n.d.).

The Grammar of Schooling: History of Graded Level Schooling

From a historical perspective, school transitions have been a challenge for many years as Tyack and Cuban (1995) state in their book, *Tinkering Toward Utopia*. In this section, I rely on their analysis and summarize their findings. In the US, in 1900, the larger school districts had eight elementary grades and four high school grades. At that time, only half of the students in the US actually reached eighth grade before dropping out of school. Issues were “rigidity and narrow academic emphasis of the educational structure” according to reformers of that time (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 69). The junior high school was designed as a structural and pedagogical solution to the problems of student academic attrition. The idea was to give students new hope and to explore their vocational opportunities in a setting that adapted to the needs of young adults, which was supported by developmental psychologists, social investigators, and opponents of child labor. Psychologist G. Stanley Hall thought that student work should be tailored to a particular stage of development for young teenagers. He thought that students in this junior high school age group were unpredictable due to spurts in physical appearance, intellectual growth, emotional development, and that schooling should be taken into consideration these psychological changes.

In 1922, Thomas Briggs, a professor at the Teachers College, Columbia stated that junior high schools have made little change in the traditional organization and work of the school and that “the junior high school is an opportunity, not a specific [remedy]; and unless you have a definite program for the reform or curricula, of the courses of study, of the methods of teaching, and of the social administration of your intermediate grades, I strongly urge you to defer the organization of the junior high schools to your successors” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 72). Briggs said that it was easier to copy the high school model of education

than to create a new institution from the ground up. As the twentieth century progressed, some changes were initiated in some more innovative junior high schools, but the traditional notion that junior high was pre-high school became the norm. Teachers in these schools were using team teaching and cross-disciplinary curriculum and continued these approaches into high school. These teachers were offering more support and guidance to students when they encountered difficult times and this approach started to filter into high schools.

Middle schools as a format was an attempt to address the development needs of adolescents from fifth or sixth grade to eighth grade. Some structures of middle schools were quite different and relied on some elementary school forms like blocked classes, but even though in many school systems, there is little difference between the structure of high school and middle school, there have been some distinct reforms. The creation of small learning communities within schools; “correlating instruction in different subjects; delegating more decision making to teams of teachers; and paying more attention to the emotional and physical health of students” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 75) have been key developments in middle schools—including at the ISB.

From personal experience, I know transitions can be difficult. While conducting research, I realized that the physiological, psychological and socio-cultural issues that make this transition incredibly difficult seem to be more difficult than what I experienced as an adolescent. The transition from middle school to high school has been explored mainly in the public-school setting in the US. Very little research has been done in private schools outside of Catholic schools, and no research has been done on international schools to my knowledge. Despite recent political changes in western democracies, the world is becoming more globally-integrated (Sachs & Warner, 1995). It is important that the ISB is aware of how this transition from middle school to high school affects students from physiological, psychological, and socio-cultural perspectives. The ISB is in a very competitive international

school market and by having a solid program in place to ease this transition could be a marketing tool for the school. More importantly, it is imperative that the ISB looks after the well-being of its students and provides them the best opportunity to find success in school.

Evidence of FoP

Dewey (2015) wrote that, “every experience in a moving force” and that “all human experience is social” (p. 38). My experience as an adult allowed me to understand the experience my co-research practitioners went through since I have made this eighth to ninth grade transition before, along with several other transitions in life. My goal was to use my experiences to see the direction their transition was taking them and to use their experience to make suggestions to the leadership team of the ISB to improve this transition in the future (Memo, May 25, 2017).

Diagnostic Assessment: Pilot Findings

The purpose of PAR was to work with a group of CPRs to inquire how the current structure in place at a large international school helps multinational students with their transition from middle school to high school with the intention of refining a process, which appears to be in need of rejuvenation. My research was conducted with twelve eighth grade students at the ISB as they entered ninth grade for the 2017/2018 school year. My goal was to include at least one male and one female from the American, Japanese, Korean, and Thai community in the sample. The students I invited to participate were chosen from a transition survey that I sent out to the entire eighth grade class of 153 students in my capacity as a high school physics teacher in the school. One hundred and five students responded. The ISB transition survey was given in the eighth-grade science courses since every student has to take science, and I have a close collegial relationship with both science teachers. One teacher forgot to give the survey to one class, and this contributed to the fact that 48 students did not take the survey.

There were 105 student respondents, 60 females and 45 males. In addition to stating their sex, students were invited to identify their nationality, how long they planned to stay at the ISB, whether they were concerned about the transition to high school, and whether they would be interested in being a part of my PAR. The survey responses allowed me to narrow the 105 respondents down to a more manageable group of 19 from which I drew participants.

The answers to the sub-questions on my initial survey yielded the following results. As shown in Figure 6, of the 105 respondents, 39 (37%) thought they were academically prepared for the transition to high school, while 56 (53.7%) thought that maybe they were prepared, and 10 (9.3%) responded that they were not academically prepared for the transition.

Of the 105 respondents in Figure 7, 34 (32.4%) thought that homework would cause them the most stress in ninth grade; 30 (28.7%) thought their academic classes would be the most stressful part of the transition, and 10 (9.3%) students placed parental pressure and being in a new environment on a par as their number one stressor. Among the less frequently identified stressors, nine respondents (8.2%) thought the new environment of high school would be the most stressful; four students (3.7%) identified their main stressor as making friends; and, to my surprise, the existence of a different grading system only concerned three respondents (2.8%); finally, longer classes and finding your classes each received two votes each (1.9%). Another surprise to me from the responses was that 11 (11.1%) students identified “other” as their biggest stressor. When I looked at the explanations that accompanied the “other” responses, two respondents said “all of the above” while three others mentioned the pressure of preparing for university.

The main difficulties students expressed confirmed what I have found in my research. Students in ninth grade are overwhelmed with the amount of work they have and how several assessments can be on the same day. The quantity of homework is also challenging and the

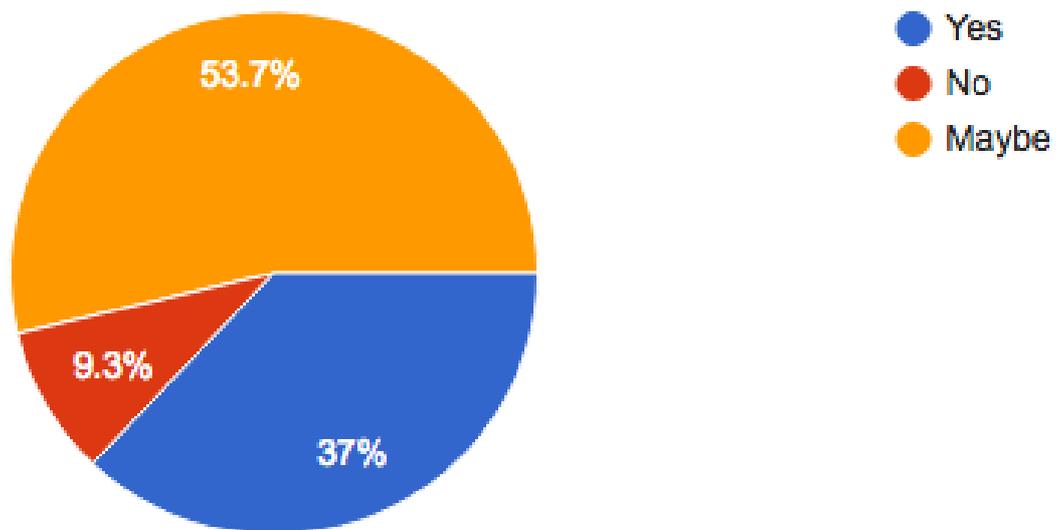


Figure 6. The percentage of 105 eighth grade students at the ISB at one of three levels of academic preparedness for high school.

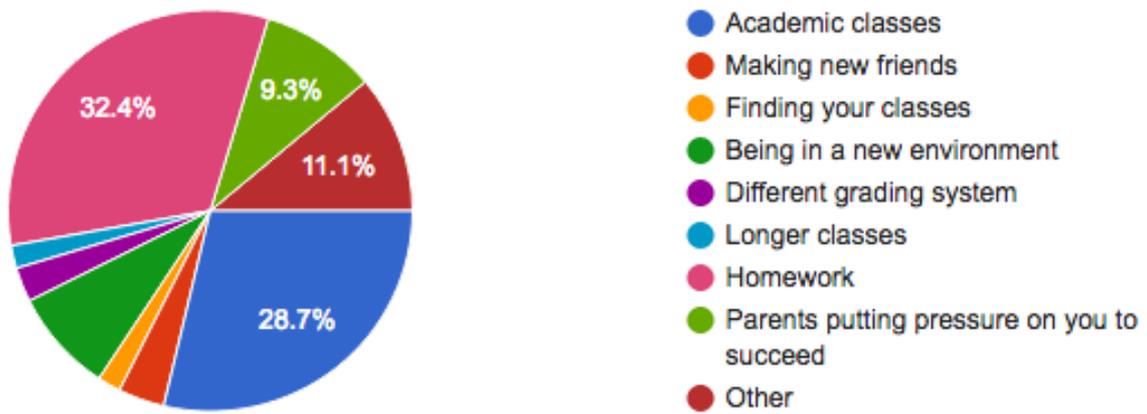


Figure 7. Percentage of main stressors reported by 105 eighth grade students at the ISB in April 2017.

fact that their grades now count for university acceptance is another stressor. Students also complained that there were meeting academic standards in middle school only to find out they are an average, or C, student in ninth grade.

The main point of my diagnostic assessment was to assist me in narrowing down the 105 students who responded to my initial survey to a potential twelve participants in my CPR and PAR. I worked to build a comfortable working relationship with my CPRs and to get to know each student individually. I did this by having each student create a journey line of his or her life and major transitions, and to write or orally express their concerns regarding moving on to ninth grade the next year.

Political/Micropolitical—Environment

English novelist George Orwell once said, “In our age there is no such thing as ‘keeping out of politics.’ All issues are political issues...” (Orwell, n.d.). This PAR is no different since the findings of this project could have political consequences for administrators and teachers—including myself. In the following paragraphs, I address the role of the Board of Trustees and the Administrators at the ISB along with the current challenges the school is facing regarding rightsizing, communication, curriculum alignment, the grading system, the Advisory program, and considerations about outcomes of this project.

Board and Administrators

The role of the ISB Board of Trustees is to set, support, review, and promote the School’s mission. The Board of Trustees is made up of fifteen officials, eleven of whom are elected, and consists primarily of parents from the school. The Board focuses on strategic issues along with supporting ISB administrators (“Board of Trustees—International School Bangkok,” 2017). The Head of School is formally appointed and accountable to the Board and oversees school operations. Under the Head of School, there are two Deputy Heads of School, one who oversees finances and the other oversees academics. The middle school and

high school have principals who manage each school, and each division has a Dean of Students and a Dean of Academics. In both the middle school and high school there are several academic departments, each led by a department head. The Athletic Director and Arts and Activity director supervise all after school sports and activities for the entire school.

Counseling Decision Affects Project

The structure of the ISB counseling department changed in 2017, as the original ninth grade only counselor now shares social-emotional counseling responsibility with two other counselors. In the past, there was a direct line of communication between the eighth and ninth grade counselors, which made collaboration easy. The addition of two other counselors makes it more difficult for the three ninth grade counselors to meet the eighth-grade counselor and the responsibilities for teaching Freshman Seminar are now be split between the three counselors. The eighth-grade counselor sees this decision negatively impacting the transition of students from eighth to ninth grade since she has developed a collegial working relationship with the original ninth grade counselor (Memo, May 21, 2017).

Current Challenges

Rightsizing. The current political environment at the ISB is apprehensive at the moment due to the recent rightsizing of staff. The ISB has had a drop—in enrollment recently, and a little over 10% of the staff was not retained for the 2017/2018 school year. The ISB is dependent on the oil industry, especially Chevron, for student enrollment. Due to the decline in oil prices, several oil companies have transferred employees out of Thailand, which has affected the student population. Increased tuition, location, along with an increase in competition between international schools has caused ISB enrollment numbers to decline over the past four years annually and a concomitant decrease in working staff. This has caused several teachers at the school to feel uneasy and uncomfortable with their job security. This could have had an adverse effect on my research and may be the reason why so many

counselors are not interested in being a part of my Professional Learning Community (PLC); they may fear that the results of the study could negatively affect the way the leadership team sees them, causing them to potentially lose their job. Once the results of my study are known, it may recommend changes that could negatively affect personnel at the school, causing people to lose their jobs. It may be that my results draw attention to myself, causing the school not to want to renew my contract or that of my wife.

Communication. As the ISB has grown in size over the years, the communication between the middle school and high school has deteriorated. Each division of the school has seen itself as its own entity with minimal communication between them. Students have had varying success moving from eighth grade to ninth grade in certain subjects because there is no time scheduled for teachers to meet between divisions to discuss academic transitions. The middle school and high school have had different schedules and grading systems. Recently, there has been a change of leadership in the middle school and there has been a push to better align the schedule and academics between the two divisions.

Grading system. One political issue that remains is how students are awarded grades in the two schools. The high school used a grading system of A, B, C, D, and F, and then changed to a 7–1 grading scale starting in the 2017/2018 school year. The middle school grades are broken up into the following categories: excelling (E), meeting/excelling (ME), meeting (M), approaching/meeting (AM), approaching (A), developing/approaching (DA), developing (D) and incomplete (I). The high school principal in 2017, expressed frustration with these grading categories since students do not know where they stand with their achievement as they enter high school. In speaking with the eighth-grade counselor it seems like there is quite a bit of resistance among middle school teachers to change this grading system even though the ISB converts the grades of students to a 1–7 scale on their official transcript if a student transfers to another school.

Curriculum alignment. The kindergarten to high school curriculum was aligned for the start of the 2017/2018 school year. Literacy, mathematics, social studies, and fine and performing arts have adopted the Common Core State standards, while science has adopted the Australian National Curriculum, world languages have adopted the American Council on Teaching Foreign Languages standards, and information communication and technology has adopted International Society for Technology in Education and the American Association of School Librarians standards. In an interview, the high school principal said that the curriculum at the ISB has been aligned for years according to Curriculum and Learning Support. He said problem is that several long tenured teachers have continued to teach what they want and have not followed the designed curriculum and these teachers have not suffered any consequences (I. Williams, personal communication, May 17, 2017). Having an aligned curriculum will only help the transition from middle school to high school if the teachers actually follow the standards addressed in their standards (Memo, May 17, 2017).

Advisory curriculum. An Advisory program was started in both middle school and high school for the 2016/2017 school year to improve the social and emotional well-being of students at the ISB and allow students to become comfortable around another adult who was not one of their primary teachers. This program was started with great intentions but struggled at times to make connections between grade levels and currently could be better aligned in eighth and ninth grade to help students with the transition to high school. In 2016/2017, the Advisory schedule in middle school met once a day at the beginning of school. In the high school, the Advisories met midway through every day 1 and day 4, which could be once or twice a week depending on the eight-day schedule. In 2017/2018, the high school Advisory sessions met once a week, and the middle school still met daily, only it started closer to the time of the high school Advisory. As the Advisory program grows, the hope is that it will be better aligned and will assist in the transition to high school. Students in

high school are still adjusting to the idea of having Advisory since it takes time out of their daily schedule and some sessions have not been particularly helpful which has caused some resentment about attending Advisory.

Considerations about outcomes of project. One political frame regarding my research project is that the ISB may not be happy with all of the findings that emerge from this action research project, which I can know only after I present the results. The school management team recognizes that this is an area in which the school needs to improve, and my research may help the school to achieve this goal of easing the transition from middle school to high school. The high school principal told me that the ISB is comfortable with its identity and that the school is not working from a deficit model. Changes are driven by the thought of taking something to the next level, and that the culture of change would have been different seven to eight years ago. The culture of the school is to see change as good; consequently, this PAR is not a threat (I. Williams, personal communication, May 17, 2017). A new high school principal started in 2017/2018, and the current culture of the school has been slow to change under his leadership.

Another political frame could be the middle school teachers may get defensive that they are not properly preparing students for high school. The middle school counselor said there are people that have been there for a long time, and they are teaching what they want; these people are “working to live and not living to work” (M. Hughes, personal communication, May 19, 2017). There could also be fear that the school could use the results of this investigation to justify further rightsizing in the middle school and replace long tenured teachers with newer teachers who earn less money.

Initially, there were worries in the high school about changing the grading system from an A-F system to a 7-1 system for the 2017/2018 school year. This change prompted several middle school teachers to wonder if they can expect a grading system change in the

middle school that mirrors the high school. This is one of the areas which I have identified as being an area of stress for students as they transition from middle school to high school (Memo, May 22, 2017).

The decision makers who will decide whether the results of this PAR can be implemented are the Head of School and the high school principal. Both individuals have given their support for the project and are keen to see the results. At the beginning of this PAR, I have explained several challenges facing teachers and administrators. The ISB is an ever-evolving school, constantly looking to improve; thus, some of the present challenges might not exist a year from now while other challenges may emerge. In the next part of Chapter 3, I discuss the people and systems for transition and support.

People and Systems for Transition and Support

The ISB has several programs and systems in place to help student's transition from middle school to high school, some of which are effective while others are not according to students (Memo, May 28, 2017). The high school counseling department has had a ninth grade only counselor for many years to help with this transition, which has been a strength of the transition process. In addition to being the counselor for the entire ninth grade, this person has also been in charge of leading Freshman Seminar, which is a program that was created for incoming ninth grade students to help with their transition to high school. The Freshman Seminar is an additional course that students take in ninth grade during the first ten weeks of the year; they learn time management skills, what the ISB community has to offer, university guidance, and they learn about the IB Diploma Programme ("Counseling—International School Bangkok," n.d.). The good intention of this course has not resulted in a worthwhile experience for many ninth graders, and this is an area in need of change. The ISB changed the counseling model, and three counselors are now involved in teaching Freshman Seminar

as of 2017/2018. This change brought new perspectives and has improved the experience for everyone involved.

The ISB started an Advisory Program for the 2016/2017 school year in both middle school and high school, which had mixed reviews in its first year. The Advisory Program was designed to help with the social and emotional aspect of school and to allow students to get to know an ISB teacher outside of an academic setting. The Advisory program has a great deal of growth potential, but at the moment should be considered a strength due to the social and emotional activities students are involved with.

The ISB also has several transition activities that are offered for eighth grade students and a parent night is offered for eighth grade parents. The ninth-grade counselors for the 2017/2018 school year gave a presentation to the eighth grade in mid-March 2017 about the transition to high school. In addition to this general meeting, they have visited all the eighth-grade social studies classes to talk about the transition and how to sign up for classes. Students were allowed 20-30 minutes to ask questions about the transition during this visit. The future ninth grade counselors were also available during lunch where students could stop by to ask questions regarding classes and the transition (M. Hughes, personal communication, May 19, 2017). The counselors at the ISB are very experienced and are the biggest asset the school has regarding the student transition to ninth grade since they have regular contact with these students (Memo, May 20, 2017).

Participants. My research is meant to impact future students at the ISB and to help them with their transition to high school. The rationale for selecting the study's participants to convene a representative PLC with a male and female participant from each of the four largest cultures at the ISB. My selection criteria included whether these students anticipated being at the ISB through the end of their ninth-grade year and whether they were at the ISB for their eighth-grade year. Once I had my survey responses from the members of the eighth-

grade class, I was able to see which students were interested in being a part of this PAR and then focused on which American, Korean, Japanese, and Thais were going to be here through the end of ninth grade. I identified 19 students, and then met with them to discuss my research and gave them a permission slip form for them and their parents to sign in order to participate in my study. This permission slip needed to be returned the first week of school in August of 2017. Only the 12 students mentioned earlier gave verbal agreement to be a part of the PAR and submitted their parental permission slips. The background information of the participants and their pseudonym names are below.

Co-practitioner researchers. The twelve students who verbally expressed interest in participating in this project were rising ninth graders for the 2017-2018 academic year. There were three female American participants and one male. The females were Emily (13), Lily (14), and Ella (13). Paul was the lone male and he was 13 years old. There was one male and two female Japanese students interested in being a part of this study. The females were Hana (15), Akami (14), and the lone male was Riku (14). Unfortunately, Riku left the ISB shortly after this study began. There was one female and four male Thai students who engaged in being a part of this PAR. The male students were Niran (14), Kiet (13), Sunan (14), and Virote (14). The lone female in the Thai group was Dao, who was 14 years of age. Unfortunately, only one female Korean expressed interest in being a part of this project and her name was Ji Su (13).

Counselors. Counselors are available throughout the year to both students and parents to discuss academic and personal matters. Starting in the second semester of eighth grade until high school graduation, counselors meet with students to discuss individual academic concerns. During ninth grade, counselors introduce the expectations and demands of high school, including graduation requirements and information about transcripts. Each counselor at the ISB has extensive training and experience helping students who encounter

social/emotional issues. Counselors meet in private with students who have social/emotional issues and advise them with strategies and techniques to deal with their problems that are affecting their personal lives. The ISB has a school psychologist that the counselors work closely with to help students learn how to cope with difficult issues of adolescence (J. Isabella, personal communication, May 18, 2017).

Current Systems of Support

Starting in 1995, school reformers in the US started to pay increasing attention to restructuring high schools. An emphasis was placed on creating environments in schools “that support the healthy social, as well as academic development of all students” (Tocci, Hochman, & Allen, 2005, p. 2). The ISB started a similar program at the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year and called it the Advisory program.

Advisory System

The difficulty of the transition to high school makes it essential that the ninth-grade Advisory program concentrated on the challenges faced by these students. The stated purpose of the Advisory program is to foster a sense of community, ensure there is an adult advocate for each child, and to develop life skills not covered in the academic curriculum. The focus of the ninth-grade Advisory is to focus on helping students become part of the ISB high school community and to help students have a successful and happy high school life (Brock, 2016). The Advisory program is divided up into four houses: Yaksha, Hongsa, Rajasi, and Makara. The number of students in each grade level has been divided equally into these four groups.

The ninth-grade Advisory starts off with students getting to know their Advisor and the members of their Advisory. During the first few meetings, fun games are played within the advisories to build trust and communication between the members of the group. Mindfulness activities and goal setting is introduced after the Advisory group feels more cohesive. The next unit starts with learning about safely using electronic communication and

practical communication skills with peers and teachers. The qualities of a good friend and dealing with conflicts with loved ones and friends are then addressed in Advisory. Students also learn about how to use ManageBac (online planning, assessment and reporting platform for the IB continuum) and about creativity, action, and service (CAS) requirements and how to be involved in school and the local community. As Advisory progresses, ninth grade students learn about the importance of creating a collaborative and caring community and how students can support each other with their learning. Students then learn about what causes stress, the effects on the human body of both good and bad stress, and they learn techniques to deal with stress, and how to deal with failure and develop resilience. In the next unit of Advisory, ninth grade students learn about the human brain and how learning takes place, and the importance of sleep at their stage of adolescence. In the second semester of Advisory, ninth grade students learn about the school values and beliefs along with the meaning of tolerance, acceptance, respect, gratitude, courage, and commitment (Brock, 2016).

Benefits of the Research to Students

The benefit of my PAR to the CPRs is minimal since the changes I proposed do not benefit students after they move to tenth grade. However, their experience during the ninth-grade transition directly impacts future classes. Understanding the transition from the students' point of view is vitally important since they are the ones experiencing the change of school environment. Improving this transition can lead to more socially and emotionally adjusted students who are better prepared academically for high school. Understanding this transition from the American, Thai, Japanese, and Korean perspective allows me to see how the ISB's current transition program supports these different nationalities. Improving this transnational experience could also be used as a marketing tool to recruit more Americans,

Japanese, and Koreans to the ISB since there is a cap on the number of Thais allowed in the school.

Intercultural and Transnational Differences

The 12 students involved in this study are from four nationalities: American, Thai, Korean, and Japanese. While the students shared some similar stressors when it came to transitioning to high school, there were cultural stressors too. The intense peer pressure to do well in school and to achieve good grades at the ISB is especially true for Confucius Heritage Cultures (CHC) including the Japanese and Koreans. Most Korean and Japanese students go back to their home country to study, where entrance into university can be difficult and competitive. I predicted that these two cultures groups would sense more academic stress than the American and Thai cultures. There should also be less cultural stress placed on the Thais since they typically study in their own country. The American, Japanese, and Korean students may find the transition more difficult since they are further from their extended families and the familiarity of their home cultures.

Role as Action Research Leader

I first became interested in the transition from middle school to high school when I worked at the American International School of Budapest (AISB). I had recently moved from working at Pechersk School International Kyiv (PSI), when I noticed on my first day of school a young lady I used to teach at PSI before she moved to Budapest. I remember the teachers at the AISB being so impressed with her and proud that she would be a future alumna of the school. I remember thinking that she spent years in Singapore and Kyiv before coming to the AISB, so her previous two schools had a huge impact on her as a student. I also noticed in my IB Diploma physics courses that the students varied quite a bit in how prepared they were for IB physics. One girl had just transferred from the International School Prague and was quite prepared for the rigor of the course. I asked the high school

counselor at the AISB whether he could tell me the dates for which students enrolled at the AISB and after receiving this information, I could see there was a statistically significant difference between the students who went through middle school at the AISB and those that transferred in. The ones who transferred in were scoring a full letter grade higher on average than those who came through the AISB middle school.

My next job after the AISB was at the ISB, and I noticed that students were not adjusting well to high school in ninth grade. At the ISB it was also an academic adjustment, but there also seemed to be more variables affecting student transition. As a result of observing these differences, I decided to look more deeply into this transition from middle school to high school at the ISB.

My role as the lead researcher in this PAR was to learn what the students transitioning from middle school to high school were dealing with from a social and emotional, academic, and cultural perspective. Understanding these aspects of the transition helped me to look at the current transition structure at the ISB to see whether teachers and administrators were meeting the needs of the students as they enter ninth grade. The CPR team of 12 students, four counselors, and I will then propose changes to our current transition program to help ease the passage of future students to high school.

I have several assets that I brought to the role as a CPR. I had a good working relationship with the eighth-grade science teachers, the eighth-grade counselor, the high school counselors, and the grade nine Advisory leaders—all of whom play a part in this study. I have conducted quite a bit of research over the years as a physics teacher and feel that the organizational, data collection, and analytical skills I have developed can help me with this. The one outstanding question I struggled with was how analytical my investigation should have been (Memo, May 20, 2017). I knew that I would be working with qualitative

observations about the transition these students would be going through but coming to a conclusion based only on qualitative observations is something I found challenging.

Once I had finalized the CPR group of 12 students, I sat down with each of them and asked them to write a Journey line of their educational experience along with providing an “I am from” poem so I can learn more about their background. Once I had this information, I then asked them to fill out a climate survey regarding their transition from middle school. I hoped to learn about the physiological, psychological, and socio-cultural worries they had about their transition. Once they entered high school, I continued to monitor this group to see how well they were adjusting as they advanced into tenth grade.

Benefits and Risks of the PAR

The group that I followed into high school, since they were engaged in a reflective experience, benefited directly and indirectly from the inquiry. In particular, the students who follow this group can potentially reap the benefits of this action research if the ISB decides to assess and integrate the results of the project and the recommendations and make changes to decrease the stress involved with the middle school to high school transition. The greatest opportunities for change will come in the academic transition from middle school to high school. The kindergarten to twelfth grade curriculum is now aligned and if the leadership team of the ISB can enforce the teaching of this curriculum it should reduce the academic transition stress. The alignment of the curriculum has also allowed for more collaboration between middle school and high school and the leadership team is now setting time aside for the academic subjects in each school to meet during the school year. The other area of significant change will come in the current Advisory program as it evolves to meet the needs of the students at the ISB. The results of this project could point to areas that need to be addressed in Advisory and Freshman Seminar to ease the social/emotional, academic, and cultural differences in the transition. The only risk I saw at the beginning of this study for this

group was being involved in this study would take some time on their part, which could have an adverse effect on the amount of time they devoted to school work or social activities.

There was the real possibility of pushback from some middle school teachers who were not following the current curriculum and teaching what they pleased. This approach to teaching may not align with the content and skills needed in future high school classes thus cause the transition to be more difficult.

In my communication with both the middle school and high school principals, neither foresaw any political issues with our project (Memo, May 28, 2017). However, there are teachers at the school who are concerned about their job security due to the recent rightsizing since they have high salaries and excellent benefits. On more than one occasion, I have heard of the “golden handcuffs” from several teachers as to why they are still teaching here after so many years. A threat of losing their job and lifestyle may make some teachers anxious about how the school ultimately interprets the results of our project. There is nothing I can do to mitigate this issue since hiring and firing is done at the leadership level. I can only assure teachers that any recommendations we have will be for teacher training and not to replace any teachers unless the leadership team feels they have been negligent in their job (Memo, May 28, 2017).

Summary

In this chapter, I have provided a detailed account of where and with whom my PAR occurred. I provided a history of the educational environment of the ISB and my personal interest in this study

In Chapter 4, I reiterate my research question and describe the research method and how I selected the twelve students involved in the PAR in more detail. Further, I describe how I conducted the first diagnostic assessment on the class of 2021 and explain the results of this PAR. After that, I explain the three cycles of the PAR, the design, and provide

background information on the students who participated in the study. Chapter 4 concludes with a discussion of the role of reflection and limitations to the study.

CHAPTER 4: ACTION RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

The purpose of my PAR was to work with a group of co-practitioner researchers (CPRs) to inquire about the current structure in place at a large international school, specifically whether the structure helps multinational students with their transition from middle school to high school. My intention was to refine the process and make it more equitable. I predicted that the shared experiences of the students in the CPR group would enhance the understanding of the middle school to high school transition for the adults in the CPR.

Action research is a collaborative approach to an investigation that seeks to engage individuals as “equal and full participants in the research process” (Stringer, 2014, p. 14). The CPR consisted of students from the four largest nationalities at the ISB—the American, Thai, Japanese and Korean student population, along with three high school counselors, the eighth-grade counselor, and me, a high school physics teacher, as the lead researcher. We collaborated together as insiders at the ISB, which we hoped would have a positive impact on the middle school to high school transition at the school. Herr and Anderson (2015) termed this type of research as “insiders in collaboration with other insiders” (p. 45). At the completion of the PAR, I have data to show the ISB leadership team areas in which the middle school to high school transition is difficult, and I will provide suggestions for how the transition can be improved and made more equitable. This collaborative exploration engages all the participants in the investigation through inquiry and acquiring information, analyzing the information/data gathered, and allow me to better understand the problems associated with the middle school to high school transition at the ISB (Stringer, 2014). The data that I gathered came through personal interviews that I memoed during individual and group

meetings with the CPR members and through the use of surveys at different times in the transition.

This chapter outlines the design of the participatory action research project, describes the participants in the study and how they were chosen, discusses the three cycles of inquiry, and finally, explains how the data were collected and analyzed. This chapter concludes with the role of reflection and limitations to this study.

Purpose and Theory of Action

The purpose of this study was to understand why the transition from middle school to high school was challenging for students at the ISB and to co-construct recommendations for new systems and processes to mitigate challenges identified in Figure 1. During the planning stage of the PAR, I identified, recruited, and gained permission from 12 middle school students who were in eighth grade at the beginning of this study. I followed this group of students as they transitioned into ninth grade and documented and analyzed these students and their transition experiences.

In looking at the transition between middle school and high school, I predicted that most of the stress that the students were feeling was based upon communication issues between the middle school and high school. Counselors in both middle school and high school, along with the high school principal, have mentioned to me that not having a common grading system is difficult for students to adjust to. Meeting expectations in middle school corresponds to receiving a 4 in high school for instance. The curriculum in middle school and high school was in the process of being vertically aligned at the start of 2017/2018, which would help the transition between grade levels. The schedule in middle school and high school was different, which made it difficult for teachers to meet together between the two schools. The ISB has also not prioritized common planning time between the two schools to better align curriculum and to moderate work between the two schools.

Research Design

This action research project was participatory and assisted the members of the CPRs in understanding the difficulties of the middle school to high school transition at the ISB and to resolve issues with the transition as it is currently structured (Stringer, 2014). Designs for improvement in education “should be co-design projects in which interventions are not done *to* people, but done *with* people” (Mintrop, 2016, p. 13). The CPR used principles of improvement science to examine the middle school to high school transition at the ISB. First, we diagnosed that the transition from middle school to high school is difficult and that these problems with the students’ perspectives are most important to understanding the transition for the purpose of this PAR. Second, we looked at what worked well in the middle school to high school transition, what did not work well, and asked whether the experiences equitable (Mintrop, 2016). Third, we/I looked at how the transition was organized at the ISB in 2017/2018, tried to understand the complexities of the transition and tried “to develop a theory of practical improvement” (Mintrop, 2016, p. 15). Fourth, we collected data frequently so we could see how the transition was evolving and understand how different stressors in the transition affect the transition as a whole. Fifth, we suggested interventions at the end of the participatory action research cycle to see whether the transition can be improved. Finally, we recommended engaging in another cycle following eighth graders as they transition into high school (Mintrop, 2016).

In the following section I explain the research questions and how these questions drove our research. I then explain how the participants were chosen for this project, the procedure for each cycle of inquiry, how the data were collected and analyzed.

Research Question

The research question for this participatory action research project was: How does the current transition structure at the ISB, through the experiences of a transnational group of

student Co-Practitioner Researchers, equitably facilitate the passage students make from eighth grade to high school?

The sub-questions for our participatory action research project were:

- To what extent were student academic needs equitably met by the high school transition structure?
- To what extent were student social and emotional needs equitably met by the high school transition structure?
- To what extent did the counselors and administrators use student information in the project to change policy and practice?
- How did my participation in the action research project enhance my leadership practices?

Participants

An action research approach allowed me to “enact an approach to inquiry that includes all relevant stakeholders in the process of investigation” (Stringer, 2014, p. 31). The stakeholders in the research were the 12-current eighth-grade students at the ISB as they entered ninth grade for the 2017/2018 school year, three high school counselors, the eighth-grade counselor, and me. My goal was to include at least one male and one female from the American, Japanese, Korean, and Thai community to be a part of this action research. The students I invited to participate were chosen from a transition survey that was sent out to the entire eighth grade class of 153 students in my capacity as a high school physics teacher in the school, to which 105 students responded. The ISB transition survey that I created was given in the eighth-grade science courses and was not compulsory; students had the option of not taking the survey, and 48 students chose not to respond.

Once the 105 participants completed the survey, I looked at the results of the four largest nationalities at the ISB to see whether the respondents had stated they were interested

in being a part of this survey. One of the questions I asked on this survey was whether they would be interested in being a part of an action research study looking at the transition from middle school to high school. As can be seen in Table 1, 75 of the 105 participants expressed that they might be interested in being a part of this action research in total. In my desired focus group there were six male and 14 female Americans, one male and four female Japanese, one female Korean, and 12 male and 13 female Thai eighth grade students. The composition of the eighth-grade cohort in terms of nationality, sex, and interest in participating in this action research project is shown in Table 1.

From the responses, I was able to see which students from the American, Korean, Japanese, and Thai communities were interested and reached out to them through their eighth-grade science teachers to meet during an eighth-grade Advisory session. During our 20-minute meeting I provided them with more information about the study and what their participation would entail. In all, I invited 19 students to the information meeting, and, from those 19, 12 expressed interest in being a part of this participatory action research. Once the composition of my PLC was settled, I substituted pseudonyms for their real names and proceeded to describe their backgrounds and personalities once I had interviewed each student.

Those from among the 12 students who obtained permission to do so joined me in a PLC over the next two years as I follow them through their transition from middle school to high school.

Up until this point, there have been a few attempts at dialogue with students about this important transition from middle school to high school, and how the current system in place supports it. The three ninth-grade counselors for 2017/2018 held an eighth-grade class assembly in mid-March 2017 regarding the transition. They also attended the eighth-grade social studies classes to inform students how to register for classes in *PowerSchool* (the

Table 1

Survey Data Results by Nationality and Sex of the 105 Eighth Grade Students at the ISB

Nationalities of students Attending Eighth Grade at the ISB	Number of Eighth Grade Males / Females	Number of Eighth Grade Male / Female respondents	Number of Eighth Grade Males / Females Interested or Maybe Interested in Participating in My Action Research	Number of Males / Females not Interested in Participating in My Action Research
American	25 / 31	13 / 24	6 / 14	7 / 10
Australian	0 / 4	0 / 3	0 / 2	0 / 1
Bhutanese	2 / 0	2 / 0	0 / 0	2 / 0
British	0 / 2	0 / 2	0 / 1	0 / 1
Canadian	5 / 1	3 / 0	3 / 0	0 / 0
Chinese	1 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	1 / 0
Colombian	0 / 1	0 / 1	0 / 1	0 / 0
Danish	1 / 1	1 / 0	1 / 0	0 / 0
Dutch	0 / 2	0 / 2	0 / 1	0 / 1
Filipino	1 / 1	1 / 1	1 / 1	0 / 0
Georgian	1 / 0	1 / 0	1 / 0	0 / 0
Hungarian	1 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0
Indonesian	0 / 2	0 / 2	0 / 2	0 / 0
Israeli	2 / 0	2 / 0	2 / 0	0 / 0
Japanese	1 / 8	1 / 4	1 / 4	0 / 0
Kenyan	1 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0
Korean	2 / 3	2 / 1	0 / 1	2 / 0
Kuwaiti	1 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0

Table 1 (continued)

Nationalities of students Attending Eighth Grade at the ISB	Number of Eighth Grade Males / Females	Number of Eighth Grade Male / Female respondents	Number of Eighth Grade Males / Females Interested or Maybe Interested in Participating in My Action Research	Number of Males / Females not Interested in Participating in My Action Research
Malaysian	0 / 1	0 / 1	0 / 1	0 / 0
Mexican	1 / 0	1 / 0	1 / 0	0 / 0
Mongolian	1 / 0	1 / 0	1 / 0	0 / 0
Norwegian	0 / 1	0 / 1	0 / 1	0 / 0
South African	0 / 1	0 / 1	0 / 1	0 / 0
Swedish	1 / 1	1 / 1	1 / 1	0 / 0
Thai	25 / 20	14 / 17	12 / 13	2 / 4
Turkish	1 / 0	1 / 0	1 / 0	0 / 0
Total	73 / 80	45 / 60	31 / 44	14 / 16

school administrative software used at the ISB) and answered questions about the transition to high school. During the time students were signing up for classes, the future ninth-grade counselors were available in the cafeteria to answer any questions the students had. The eighth-grade counselor met with the future ninth grade counselors to discuss gifted students and students with social and emotional problems. The identified students have been split evenly between the three high school counselors for next year (J. Isabella, personal communication, May 18, 2017).

The PLC I conducted looked at the structures in place to see whether there are areas in which the students could be better served in order to alleviate the stress of this transition and make it more equitable. My PAR also allowed these 12 students to have significant involvement with the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the current system and the potential improvement of the transition process for future students (Stringer, 2014).

Three years into my employment at the ISB, I had some idea of the areas that make this transition difficult for students. First, there is no common grading system between middle school and high school, which adds a lot of stress to students trying to identify where they stand academically upon entering high school. Second, traditionally, there has been poor communication between middle school and high school, and only in 2017 has an effort been made to align and enforce curriculum from kindergarten through twelfth grade. This led to large adjustments in academic learning and an increase in the quantity of work assigned for students as they transition. Third, there is the pressure of grades counting for university acceptance in ninth grade whereas this did not exist in eighth grade. Fourth, the social and emotional development of students has been neglected in the past, and only in 2018, has an Advisory program been put into place to help students. Fifth, there are cultural aspects that make this transition difficult for students, especially for children of parents of Confucius Heritage Cultures (CHC) like the Japanese and Koreans (Tan & Yates, 2010).

The first part of my participatory action research and intervention focused on working with my PLC to generate themes for my evolving research to investigate. The first step was crucial since my perspective on the transition and its difficulty was based on my views as an adult and as an educator in the role of a high school physics teacher. Consequently, the issues I perceived may or may not have been the biggest challenges my co-practitioner researchers perceived that they face in making this transition.

My exploration took place through a series of action research cycles. The initial step, conducted in April 2017, was the initial survey of all 153 students who were in grade eight at the ISB (with 105 responses).

Cycles of Action Research: Cycle 1—Fall 2017

The first cycle of the participatory action research started when I obtained written permission from the parents of the 12 students who gave informed consent to participate in the project. I also obtained written consent from the three ninth grade counselors to be a part of our study.

Our initial meeting focused on what students were finding stressful about the transition to high school now that they had reached ninth grade. I determined this through my analysis of surveys and personal interviews; importantly, I invited each co-practitioner researcher to engage in the materials as well. The role of the co-practitioner researchers in Cycle 1 was to express their perceived stressors prior to entering ninth grade and to provide me with feedback about how they thought the ISB has helped them to make this transition before entering high school. In order to do this, I needed to survey the students the weekend before school started to see what their preconceived stressors were and then interview them individually on the first day of school before the stressful transition began.

I then identified what these stressors were and examined how the current structure at the ISB could be changed to alleviate some of this stress. The 12 students in my PLC helped

me to identify what they were finding difficult about the transition. We worked collaboratively to generate a draft proposal on areas of improvement in both eighth and ninth grade at the end of the first semester. I believe that it is impossible to create a completely stress-free transition, but actions can be taken to improve this transition for multi-national students making this passage. These improvements were the changes that we as a PLC would suggest to the school administration after Cycle 1 was complete.

I met with my PLC during the first week of school in August 2017 to form a baseline of where they believed they were with their transition to date. As the year progressed, I met with my PLC prior to the winter break in November 2017. During these meetings, I investigated how students were dealing with their identified stressors by asking them to draw the most stressful aspect of the middle school to high school transition to date. After completion of the drawings, I asked the students individually to explain their sketches and why this represented such a stressful event. I also met with the three high school counselors individually and asked them to draw the most stressful facet of the transition to high school for students and where they saw themselves as counselors in their drawings. From these drawings, I started to learn how their transition could have been made easier by the ISB.

Cycles of Action Research: Cycle 2—Spring 2018

The second cycle of the research started in January 2018. I requested that each student submit to me a digital photograph of what they thought was the most stressful aspect of the transition at the start of the second semester of their ninth-grade year. Through Photovoice analysis, each student then had his or her photo displayed in my classroom, where the students in this study could see the photos together and discuss the themes they saw in them. The students in my PLC were divided into three groups and found themes while also explaining the meaning behind their photographs. In March 2018, I asked three students in my PLC to keep a detailed diary of how they spent their time for one week and what

activities they had to sacrifice to complete these activities. From these two activities, I was able to learn what the students perceived as the most significant stressors halfway through their ninth-grade year and to see in depth how a small subgroup of students spent their time during a typical week at the ISB.

Cycles of Action Research: Cycle 3—Fall 2018

The final stage of my research started in August 2018. At that time, the students were in tenth grade and would be beginning their transition to the IB Diploma program in eleventh grade. I surveyed each co-practitioner researcher about their experiences in high school to learn more about the most stressful parts of their transition and to ask for recommendations they would make about easing the transition from middle school to high school. During this research cycle, I also interviewed one student in this study, Niran, and one of the high school counselors, Gary. From these two interviews, I created two vignettes. In September 2018, I hosted a community learning exchange (CLE) where I presented my findings from PAR Cycle 1 and PAR Cycle 2. During this CLE, I collected data in the form of drawings from the teachers and school administrators in attendance regarding what they believed were the most significant stressors in the transition to high school. At the end of the CLE, I asked each participant to draw a Journey Line of the stressors they believed students face in the tenth-grade transition. In October 2018, I completed PAR Cycle 3 by interviewing the eighth-grade counselor and the high school head of science to see what transfer they took from their participation in my CLE and to ask for their recommendations for easing the student transition into high school.

Data Collection Instrumentation

A major component of qualitative data that is well-collected “is that they focus on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that we have a strong handle on what ‘real life’ is like” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 11). Using qualitative data

collection, I was able to keep track of the chronological flow and events of the student transition through high school, received feedback on the transition, and with the help of my CPRs explained how the transition can be improved. The qualitative data collection for the PAR was collected through memoing, interviews, surveys, drawings, diaries, Journey Lines, and photos of the most stressful aspects of the transition from middle school to high school. Table 2 displays each of the research questions, the data sources used for data collection, and the methods used for triangulating the results.

Memos

Throughout the participatory action research process, I memoed my observations through both a narrow and wide lens as my student CPRs transitioned through high school, and I stored these memos on my Google drive. I created a Google document for each student in my PLC so they could digitally keep track of their memos about their experiences as they transitioned through ninth grade which allowed me to memo about their individual experiences. One idea I considered was adding a semi-structured interview with the parents of the participants on the first parent-teacher conference in October 2017 and a second meeting during the second parent-teacher conference in March 2018. This would have enabled me to memo the experiences the parents saw their children going through with the transition. This turned out not to be feasible due to the heavy volume of parents I saw during the parent-teacher conferences in October 2017 and March 2018. Although memoing is usually conceptual in intent (Miles & Huberman, 1994), it was helpful in making sense of the raw data I collected and helped to answer the research questions (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008).

Interviews

In my position as a high school physics teacher, I was unable to observe the transition of all 12 of my CPRs all of the time and how they were interpreting their transition through

Table 2

Data Collection Links to Research Questions

Research Question (sub-question)	Data Source (Metrics)	Triangulated With
To what extent were student academic needs equitably met by the high school transition structure?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student interviews • Student survey • HoD interviews • Counselor interviews • Qualitative Data Drawings • Photovoice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memos • Observations
To what extent were student social and emotional needs equitably met by the high school transition structure?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student interviews • Student survey • Counselor interviews • Qualitative Data Drawings • Photovoice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memos • Observations
To what extent do the counselors and administrators use the student information in this project to change policy and practice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher and administrative input • Counselor interviews • Qualitative Data Drawings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memos • Observations
How does my participation in the action research project enhance my leadership practices?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations

high school (Merriam, 1998). To mitigate that, I interviewed my CPRs. This was done in both one-on-one meetings and as a group. During this time, I recorded our interviews using QuickTime Player, and these interviews were stored in my Google Drive where each student had a folder where their qualitative data were stored. I drew the interview questions from a range of questioning techniques, such as hypothetical, devil's advocate, ideal position, and interpretive questioning. The structuring of the questions ranged from highly structured pre-determined questions, to a mix of highly structured and less structured questions, to exploratory and open-ended questions. It was important that I used familiar language with my CPRs since they had different levels of English acquisition, and they needed to understand the questions I was asking them (Merriam, 1998). Interviews that I did with the counselors were also social in nature, but since they were colleagues and not experiencing the transition personally; the interviews had the potential to be a learning event for both the counselors and me (Edwards & Holland, 2013). The interview questions I used in August 2017 for the first cycle are located in Appendices C and D.

Surveys

A survey was used initially to determine the number of students interested in being a part of my participatory action research project. Once this survey was taken, I was able to determine which American, Thai, Japanese, and Korean students were able to participate in this participatory action research. This survey also allowed me to understand what the main stressors students were anticipating when they reach ninth grade. The questions on the initial survey can be found in Appendix B.

Drawings and Photovoice

Drawings were used to collect data for the most stressful event from my CPR group of students and counselors in PAR Cycle 1. During PAR Cycle 3, drawings were also used to collect data from my CLE participants on what they perceived to be the most stressful

component of the middle school to high school transition. The use of Photovoice in PAR Cycle 2 allowed the CPR students to submit a picture that represented the most stressful aspect of the transition to high school.

Diaries and Journey Lines

Detailed diaries were written by three student CPRs during PAR Cycle 2. These diaries allowed me to see what a typical week was like for students experiencing this transition into ninth grade. Journey Lines were used to collect data during my CLE in PAR Cycle 3. The participants wrote down the most stressful events on a piece of paper in chronological order for the tenth-grade year and positioned these events based upon how significant the events were as stressors. Appendix H displays the Journey Lines created by my CLE participants.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through qualitative means. To understand concepts from a textual data source it is important to give meaning to the text. One way of analyzing textual content is through Open Coding (Khandkar, n.d.). Open Coding includes defining, labeling, and developing categories based on the dimensions and properties of the text and is used to analyze qualitative data. I collated the results of my interviews, memos, and surveys to look for trends in the stressors that students were facing with the transition. I also observed the participants and made notations about how I felt they were handling the transition, as I discovered through the questions I asked them.

Qualitative data analysis consists of three parts: noticing, collecting, and thinking about interesting things (Khandkar, n.d.). This is usually a non-linear repeated process. As more data are collected, new information needs to be analyzed, which also may cause the researcher to re-analyze the existing data. Detailed notes on observations and interviews need

to be taken. In analyzing this information, I needed to mark important sections and add descriptive names or codes to it, which is the first step in Open Coding (Khandkar, n.d.).

The first step in analyzing qualitative data is to sort through the data, assimilate it, and make comparisons for similarities and differences. The different parts of the data were marked with an appropriate label, or code, so that it could be further analyzed later.

Role of Reflection/Praxis

Reflection was a key component of my participatory action research since it involved three cycles of inquiry. The qualitative data that I collected from the PLC, counselors, heads of departments, and my own personal observations was assimilated. The students were asked to reflect on their transition throughout the three cycles of inquiry, and I needed to reflect on my notes, observations, and survey results. My desire to undertake this participatory action research project was to understand why the middle school to high school transition is so difficult at the ISB from a psychological and socio-cultural perspective. Through personal reflection and with the help of my work colleagues and my East Carolina University (ECU) professors, I was able to determine this research methodology and the research questions. My research question evolved with input from my ECU professors and personal discoveries with my literature review.

Throughout the three cycles of participatory action research, I continuously reflected as qualitative data were collected. These reflections were through personal memos, memos from my CPRs, interviews, and surveys. The goal was to collate all of this data, assimilate it, and use the data to improve the middle school to high school transition at the ISB.

Study Limitations

Designing this PAR and controlling my own personal bias was difficult but essential. I needed to be careful not to influence the opinions of the student participants with my interview questions and my surveys. I leaned on the advice and experience of my East

Carolina University professors, along with trusted counselors at the ISB when I wrote my interview questions.

One major limitation to this study was that there were not enough students involved from the four nationalities mentioned earlier. It is unlikely that the experience of a couple of students reflects the transition all the students of that nationality experienced at the ISB or other private international schools. Several of the students involved in this survey have also been to several schools, which means they may find this transition easier, or even harder, than students who have been at the ISB for their entire academic time.

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined my theory of action for my participatory action research on the psychological and socio-cultural challenges that transnational students face in the transition from middle school to high school at the ISB. There were three cycles of action research, during which I gathered data. I analyzed the data using Open Coding to find trends and patterns with the transition issues faced. Throughout the course of this project, I was able to make recommendations for how to ease the transition into high school for future eighth grade classes. In Chapter 5, I report the preliminary findings for PAR Cycle 1.

CHAPTER 5: PAR CYCLE 1

Introduction

As previously outlined, the aim of this action research was to engage 12 students in an examination of the physiological, psychological, and socio-cultural factors related to the transition from middle school to high school, so this transition could be better understood and changes could be suggested to ease the transition in future classes at the ISB. I investigated how transnational students at this international school experience the psychological and socio-cultural transitions from middle school to high school.

Having already detailed the selection process for the 12 students in the CPR group and the questions and most common responses that these students gave in two interviews in the Fall of 2017 about the transition from middle school to high school, this chapter focuses instead on what happened next. Each participant in this CPR group went through a second interview in which they had to draw the most stressful aspect of the transition from middle school to high school and answer questions regarding their drawings. The three high school counselors, who are a part of this CPR group, also had to create a drawing and elaborate on questions I asked regarding their pictures.

Process Behind PAR Cycle 1

In Chapter 4, I wrote about the students and counselors who made up my CPR group and how the 12 students in the CPR group were chosen from an eighth-grade survey and finalized through a follow-up meeting and permission slip forms. The three adults in the CPR group were the counselors who work with ninth graders at the ISB.

Before the start of school in August 2017, I surveyed (electronically via Google Forms) the 12 participants so I could get to know them better before we started working together as a CPR group. I embedded a video introducing myself and provided biographical information for the students so the students would be familiar with me and to give them an

example of the detail in the answers I was looking for in the biographical questions that followed. The second part of the survey had an embedded video of me introducing the transition questions that they had to answer. I thought this was important to share my struggles with transitions and to illustrate how detailed their responses should be. With this survey, I also hoped to get a baseline of where they were emotionally before making the transition to high school. Appendix C shows the questions that I asked in the survey.

Time was of the essence when it came to collecting the data for PAR Cycle 1 when school started. I had the difficult challenge of trying to meet with each student participant in the CPR group early in the semester to get a feel of how the transition from middle school to high school was affecting them while the newness of the experience was fresh in their minds. As a physics teacher at the ISB, I did not have access to any of these students in class as they are required to take chemistry in the first semester of ninth grade. Instead, I emailed each individual to set up a time to meet for their first interview. Of the 12 participants, ten met with me during lunch or after school. With the last two participants, Virote and Emily, I had to reach out to their counselors to have them encourage the students to see me regarding transition questions. Table 3 presents the names, nationality, sex, and number of years each student CPR participant has been at the ISB.

I used this first recorded interview to welcome the students to high school, and we shared our summer experiences to help make the experience more personal and comfortable. Before going into the interview questions, I reviewed each student's survey responses with them and sought clarification on some of their answers. I then asked each student a series of questions to see how their transition to high school was going after two weeks into school. I was primarily interested in what they believed was the biggest difference between middle school and high school, what their most difficult course was and what made it so difficult, how they would compare their middle school teachers to their high school teachers, and

Table 3

Name, Nationality, Sex, and Number of Years Each CPR Participant has Attended the ISB

Name	Sex	Nationality	Years at ISB
Akhari	Female	Japanese	Two
Hana	Female	Japanese	Two
Ji Su	Female	Korean	Two
Dao	Female	Thai	Ten
Kiet	Female	Thai	Eleven
Niran	Male	Thai	Nine
Sunan	Male	Thai	Two
Virote	Male	Thai	Six
Ella	Female	USA	Ten
Emily	Female	USA	Five
Lily	Female	USA	Five
Paul	Male	USA	Eleven

which current structures at the ISB they found to be helpful in the transition. Appendix C provides the questions that I asked of each CPR participant.

During the first two weeks of November, I scheduled meetings with the high school counselors in the CPR group and had them start our meeting by drawing what they perceived to be the most stressful aspect of the transition from middle school to high school from their counseling experience with the current ninth grade class. Each counselor was presented with a blank A4 size piece of paper along with eight different colored pens to create their drawing. I was also curious to know what the counselors believed were the assets and challenges for students transitioning into high school and whether they had specific observations about the American, Thai, Japanese, and Korean students in this transition. In addition to this picture, I audio-recorded their response along with a series of follow up questions I asked them. Appendix D presents the questions that I asked the counselors in the CPR group.

In mid-November 2017, I then met with again with the students. Instead of sending out an email request to meet with the students, I created a Google Document in which I presented slots of free time over the course of the next two weeks and encouraged them to sign up. Nine students signed up initially and met with me for their second transition interview. I sent numerous email reminders to the other three members of my CPR group, but they did not respond to my requests. Ultimately, I had to reach out to their Chemistry 1 teachers to ask to meet with them during class time, so I could complete my second round of interview questions.

The structure of the second round of interview questions was similar to what the high school counselors experienced. I presented each student with a blank piece of A4 paper and eight pens of different colors. I then asked them to draw the most stressful aspect of the middle school to high school transition to date. Once each student finished their drawing, I

then audio recorded their response to explain their picture along with several follow-up questions.

After the completion of their drawings, I was curious to learn what had changed for the students since our initial meeting regarding the stress of the transition. Each student had experienced Freshmen Seminar and their Advisory by that time, so I asked them whether they had found these sessions helpful with the transition. I also asked them to reflect on what changes they would make to their eighth-grade experience to help them adjust better to the transition to high school. The questions in the final interview of PAR Cycle 1 can be found in Appendix C.

In summary, PAR Cycle 1 consisted of me interviewing the student participants in late August to early November about their initial feelings on the transition from middle school to high school. In early November, I interviewed each high school counselor and asked them to draw the most stressful aspect of the middle school to high school transition from their standpoint and asked them follow up questions about their drawings. In late October and November of 2017, I interviewed each student participant in the CPR group and asked them to draw a picture of the most stressful aspect of the transition from middle school to high school and answer some follow up questions from their drawing.

Emerging Themes

The transition from middle school to high school is a definite closing of a chapter in a young person's life and with this closing four significant themes, and several subthemes emerged from the interviews; those themes are presented in Table 4.

A summary of the codes from the interview transcripts can be seen in Table 5 along with the prevalence of responses in each interview and by students and counselors. Table 5 shows the code applied and provides a description of the answers by students and counselors

Table 4

Major Transition Themes from the PAR Cycle 1 Interviews

Major Theme	Subthemes
Academic stress	More homework
	Faster pace of learning in the classroom
	More summative assessments
	More difficult course work
	Class rank and Grade Point Average (GPA)
Time Management	Effect of grades on being accepted into university
	Balancing after school activities with academic demands
	Lack of sleep due to increased work load
Social Pressures	Lack of free time
	Change in friendships
	Peer competition
Teacher / Student Relationships	Internal pressure
	High school teachers are stricter than middle school teachers
	High school teachers have higher standards than middle school teachers

Table 5

Summary of the Codes and Descriptions from the One on One CPR Interviews

Code	Description of Answers by Students and Counselors	Tally Interview 1 / Interview 2
SAS—HW	Student Academic Stress Homework	9 / 8
CAS—HW	Counselor Academic Stress Homework	3
SAS—FP	Student Academic Stress Faster Pace	6 / 8
CAS—FP	Counselor Academic Stress Faster Pace	5
SAS—MA	Student Academic Stress More Assessments	8 / 7
CAS—MA	Counselor Academic Stress More Assessments	3
SAS—MD	Student Academic Stress More Difficult	7 / 12
CAS—MD	Counselor Academic Stress More Difficult	4
SAS—GPA	Student Academic Stress Grade Point Average	1 / 17
CAS—GPA	Counselor Academic Stress Grade Point Average	10
SAS—UNI	Student Academic Stress University Acceptance	1 / 6
CAS—UNI	Counselor Academic Stress University Acceptance	3
STM—AVA	Student Time Management Activities vs Academics	8 / 15
CTM—AVA	Counselor Time Management Activities vs Academics	5
STM—LOS	Student Time Management Lack of Sleep	2 / 10
CTM—LOS	Counselor Time Management Lack of Sleep	3
STM - LFT	Student Time Management Lack of Free Time	1 / 6
CTM - LFT	Counselor Time Management Lack of Free Time	2
SSP—CF	Student Social Pressures Change in Friends	2 / 9
CSP—CF	Counselor Social Pressures Change in Friends	4
SSP—PC	Student Social Pressures Peer Competition	1 / 12

Table 5 (continued)

Code	Description of Answers by Students and Counselors	Tally Interview 1 / Interview 2
CSP—PC	Counselor Social Pressures Peer Competition	3
SSP—IP	Student Social Pressures Internal Pressure	1 / 3
CSP—IP	Counselor Social Pressures Internal Pressure	3
STSR—MS	Student Teacher Student Relationship More Strict	2 / 0
CTSR—MS	Counselor Teacher Student Relationship More Strict	1
STSR—HS	Student Teacher Student Relationship Higher Standards	4 / 0
CTSR—HS	Counselor Teacher Student Relationship Higher Standards	2
STSR—MDK	Student Teacher Student Relationship More Difficult to Know	4 / 2
CTSR—MDK	Counselor Teacher Student Relationship More Difficult to Know	0

that are related to these codes. The number of responses to these answers has been tallied for the first and second interviews taken during the Fall semester of 2017.

Pressure for Earning High Grades

Pressure to succeed in school increases as students enter high school since their academic grades now count towards acceptance into university. In this section I elaborate on how the stress experienced by students is different for students in the IB Diploma when compared to general education students. I also detail how cultural differences between European-American and CHC cultures are also evident in the amount of pressure thought by students to succeed in school and how parental pressure placed on their children also increases once students reach high school.

Li (2012) noted that in addition to these developmental changes that require the adolescent to “try on” adult roles, children in school experience added pressure to achieve, and that usually translates to the most visible sign of academic success—getting good grades. Suldo, Shaunessy, Thalji, Michalowski, and Shafer (2009) found a correlation between stressors and academic achievement between International Baccalaureate (IB) students and general education students. They found that lower grades with IB students were associated with more academic stress, which makes sense since lower grades impact their college transcripts. Interestingly, they also found that higher grades were associated with more academic stress in general education students. Feld and Shusterman (2015) found that “both positive and negative factors appear to be related to the unique environment of high achievement programs” (p. 32), like the ISB. Academic success and high achievement, according to these researchers seem to correlate with success and well-being in several social, emotional and academic measurements in their studies. Niran was one of the highest achieving students in his class and a great deal of his happiness came from being successful in school. He said: “It’s the pressure to do well. I so want to do well” (PAR Cycle 1, October

31, 2017). Harry, one of the high school counselors, confirmed that some students experienced pressures to be successful. He said:

There's some pressures and anxiety because of the realism of coming into the high school is quite a competitive environment. Because of that, I think there is some fallout in regard to mental health at times. I do see that as one of the challenges is that, yes, they might be self-motivated in this competition. To an extent, that is healthy, but it can be quite unhealthy if it is taken to an extreme. (PAR Cycle 1, November 7, 2017)

There also is a cultural component to the importance of grades. Tan and Yates (2010) stated research from Genshaft and Broyles that adolescents from CHC backgrounds report that academic problems are the most common cause of stress in students since they spend so much time within their school environment. Buchmann and Dalton (2002) noted that the high academic expectations placed on adolescents in CHC countries have a direct impact on student academic achievement. This helps to explain the high educational performance of Asian students when comparing them to White, Hispanics and African-American students in the US (Sue & Okazaki, 1990; Tan & Yates, 2010). VanderGast et al. (2015) acknowledged that 56.5% of Korean adolescents experience stress due to academic related concerns. Ji Su, who is Korean, confirmed that she experienced stress over academics. She mentioned that her peers take their studies "really seriously. In middle school, they were like, eh, we can just try our best. Now, everyone is preparing for it, everyone is really ready for it" (PAR Cycle 1, November 1, 2017). Ji Su also stated that she felt "pressure" (PAR Cycle 1, November 1, 2017) and that it came from herself and her mother. Her mother was stressing the importance of grades to her at the beginning of ninth grade: "My mom told me high school really matters when you go to university" (PAR Cycle 1, November 1, 2017). High school counselor Gary said: "Too much self-esteem, in my opinion is attached with Korean kids is tied to their scores. A lot of them are highly successful, but the ones that are less successful have really a difficult time keeping their self-esteem" (PAR Cycle 1, November 10, 2017).

Parental expectations for their children's long-term educational achievement have a critical affirmative effect on the academic development and performance of adolescents (Froiland, & Davison, 2014). The push for quality often reflected by higher grades is one primary indicator of academic attainment, and that rests in the grade point average (GPA). Isakson and Jarvis (1999) noted that GPA decreased markedly between the end of eighth grade and the end of ninth grade. The GPA can be a good indicator of how well a student is adjusting to a new school environment and how well they understand the expectations of their new teachers (Langenkamp, 2009; Schiller, 1999) because an inverse relationship has been observed between the number of stressors in a student's life and GPA; the more stressors a student had, the lower their GPA (Roybal et al., 2014). This drop in GPA is typically temporary for students who are not considered at-risk (Catterall, 1998; Langenkamp, 2009).

Early in ninth grade, Emily visited universities in the U.S. state of Connecticut with her parents and missed over a week of school. She did not realize how much work she missed until she returned since the pace of her classes was faster in high school than in middle school. She stated: "I didn't really realize it until I came back and realized I have a lot of work to catch up on. I had to try to remember everything that I learned before I went, and I had a bunch of new material too. Everything just piled up" (PAR Cycle 1, November 28, 2017). To make matters worse, her computer also crashed when she returned and was without her hard drive for a week: "That has been a bit difficult, the whole GPA thing; your grades go down if you turn in things late" (PAR Cycle 1, November 28, 2017). However, as Catterall (1998) and Langenkamp (2009) found, Emily was able to quickly bring her grades and GPA up since she was not an at-risk student (Memo, December 7, 2017).

The ISB is a major international school serving a community of highly educated and wealthy families. These families are used to being successful and apply pressure on their

children to be successful too. In addition, there is a cultural component to this pressure as students from CHC background report a lot of stress from their parents and from not wanting to disappoint their elders. Gary was blunt with his observations of parents from CHC cultures, “A lot of parents are looking too closely to their (child’s) grades. It’s hard to satisfy their parent’s expectations so they are under a lot of pressure” (PAR Cycle 1, November 10, 2017). Later in the interview, he said: “So, kids will work really hard and then not to be successful and they feel like they’ve let their parents down” (PAR Cycle 1, November 10, 2017). He also indicated that he has to help them “work through the fact that they’re doing their best; that’s all that anybody’s going to ask from them. I’m trying to convince them that their assessment on a math quiz is really not a whole lot to do with their own personal worth and whether or not they are a good person” (PAR Cycle 1, November 10, 2017).

Academic Stress

The most common theme to emerge from the interviews was academic stress. The ISB is a highly competitive school and pressure is placed on students by their teachers, peers, and parents to be as successful as possible. In addition, there is academic pressure due to more difficult classes. In coding the transcripts of my CPR interviews, six academic stress sub-themes emerged. In high school, compared to middle school, there was more homework, faster-paced classes, more assessments, more difficult assignments, and the added worries about GPA and university acceptance.

Increased homework. As Table 5 shows, an increase in homework was a common stressor. During the August interviews, there were nine mentions of increased homework as a stressor, and in November, this number was eight. This indicated that students were still receiving a great deal of homework and that the homework load was more than they had experienced in middle school. Hana mentioned in her initial interview that there is “more homework in high school” (PAR Cycle 1, September 4, 2017). Increased homework

was an early concern for many of the students in my CPR group, although there was one outlier: Sunan said, “I thought there’d be much more homework than there is. There is still a lot, but less than I expected” (PAR Cycle 1, September 8, 2017). Emily described her drawing (see Figure 8) thusly: “It’s supposed to be my piles and piles of homework. The lamp, the weirdly shaped lamp, it’s on, representing being on late at night. It’s like the amount of work from day to night which is kind of stressful for me” (PAR Cycle 1, November 28, 2017).

On the subject of workload, Dao said, “I have lots of homework to do every day from other subjects” (PAR Cycle 1, November 3, 2017). The most striking homework related drawing and story came from Kiet. In middle school, on October break you would not have homework at all. And so, coming into high school, I wasn’t here on Friday before the break. So, I did not think we had homework. Because in middle school it would be like that you would not have homework over the October break. So, I did not bother checking Haiku (where classwork is posted online). When I came back to school on Monday and Tuesday, I showed up with like no homework done for the class. (PAR Cycle 1, November 2, 2017)

Her drawing is Figure 9.

Fast-paced instruction. Another common academic stressor was the faster pace of instruction in high school classrooms when compared to middle school. In Table 5 there were six tallies during the August interviews and eight tallies in the November interviews showing that this was a consistent stressor the entire semester. Sunan mentioned in his first interview that “in middle school, it was less intense than here. I feel that high school teachers move a bit quicker through the lessons” (PAR Cycle 1, September 8, 2017). Niran mentioned in his first interview that “the stuff the teachers teach are mainly similar just a little bit of a step higher (in difficulty and pace)” (PAR Cycle 1, September 4, 2017).

Assessments. The next academic stressor that was evident after the CPR interviews was an increase in the number of assessments and the difficulty of high school classes compared to middle school classes. In Table 5, seven tallies (interview one) and eight (interview two) stated that they had more assessments. One thing that was not surprising was

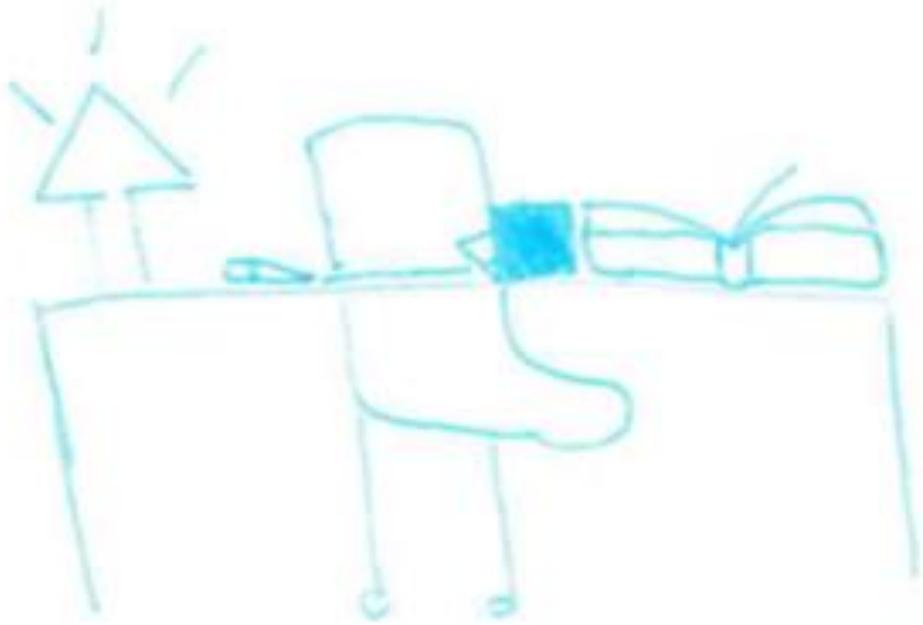


Figure 8. Emily's drawing of her increased homework load in high school.

After the break...



Figure 9. Kiet's drawing of her main academic stressor—homework.

that the students in the CPR group found their classes more difficult as the semester progressed, with seven tallies in August and 12 in November. Ji Su voiced her concern over an increase in the number of assessments and the uneven scheduling in our first interview. She said, “I think like all the assignments and the lab report and all those homeworks; it’s like in one week. Every week it is like so calm, and it’s okay, then one week it is like boom” (PAR Cycle 1, September 6, 2017). Paul found the increase in testing to be the most stressful part of the middle school to high school transition to date. He said in our second interview when describing his drawing “the tests are about every two weeks now; formative or summative. Compared to eighth grade of one test a month. It’s kind of stressful” (PAR Cycle 1, November 1, 2017). The young man in his drawing is meant to be him, and he is not happy (see Figure 10).

Increased homework, faster-paced classes, more assessments and more difficult classes were also mentioned by all three counselors when I interviewed them. Two of the counselors incorporated these themes, and Juanita’s drawing is in Figure 11 along with her analysis.

Juanita explained her drawing, explicating the themes, thusly:

In middle school, I have the smaller books just to indicate that I think that it felt more manageable to them in those core subjects. I included science into this too; I just did three. In high school, it’s the volume of work and depth, and it’s the expectations have risen. I have met with almost all my freshman, there are a couple more I need to meet, but consistently what they have said is that they are working way harder than in middle school and the expectations are higher. (PAR Cycle 1, November 1, 2017)

Grades and university acceptance. The last two academic stressors were GPA and acceptance into university, and these two stressors are linked since a high GPA is essential to gain acceptance into a prestigious college. At the ISB, the expectation is that each student will have a good chance of getting accepted into a good university. However, in the acculturation to high school, these factors must receive attention. In the first interview, there



Figure 10. Paul's drawing of his main stressor in the middle school to high school transition—assessments.



Figure 11. Ninth grade counselor Juanita's drawing of the main stressors ninth graders face in their transition from middle school to high school.

was only one mention of GPA and university acceptance in August; those tallies ballooned to 17 and six when I met with the students in the CPR group in November. Emily found the work in high school to be “the most challenging part” (PAR Cycle 1, September 8, 2017) of the transition. Even though the ISB no longer had a live grade book, she and other students have found a way to keep track of their GPAs. As she said in her second interview, “we find ways to calculate it a lot. It’s really stressful” (PAR Cycle 1, September 8, 2017). Hana lamented in our second interview that “it is kind of stressful not knowing your grade or know your scores. In middle school, when you get back, you kind of know your grades or know your scores” (PAR Cycle 1, October 30, 2017).

Ella had university acceptance as her main stressor, as shown in Figure 12. She described her drawing as “It’s just two tests. One with a good grade and one with a bad grade and then it’s leading to whether or not I’ll get into, er, that test could get someone into a good or bad university or a university at all” (PAR Cycle 1, November 8, 2017).

Ella’s opinion is not surprising according to ninth grade counselor, Harry, who said:

As much as we don’t try, for example, the college piece, we really don’t try to push the college piece on to students or talk about the college piece until late in the second semester of tenth grade, we already know there are different pressures that are on them when they step into ninth grade. We are mindful of that, but I do see that as one of the challenges is that, yes, they might be self-motivated in this competition. (PAR Cycle 1, November 7, 2017)

This competition that Harry was speaking about is discussed later in Chapter 5 when I consider the social pressures facing students at the ISB. Gary, who is also a ninth-grade counselor, had the following perspective on the academic stressors of GPA and university acceptance that students place on themselves. He said:

Building a resume starts in ninth grade. The theme is that it all starts to count now. So, high school, ninth grade first semester is going to be on a transcript that somebody will see further down the line. So, you better get your act together. That is a real pressure situation for a lot of kids. It’s sort of new to them in some ways. You have a sense that it all starts to count now. (PAR Cycle 1, November 10, 2017)

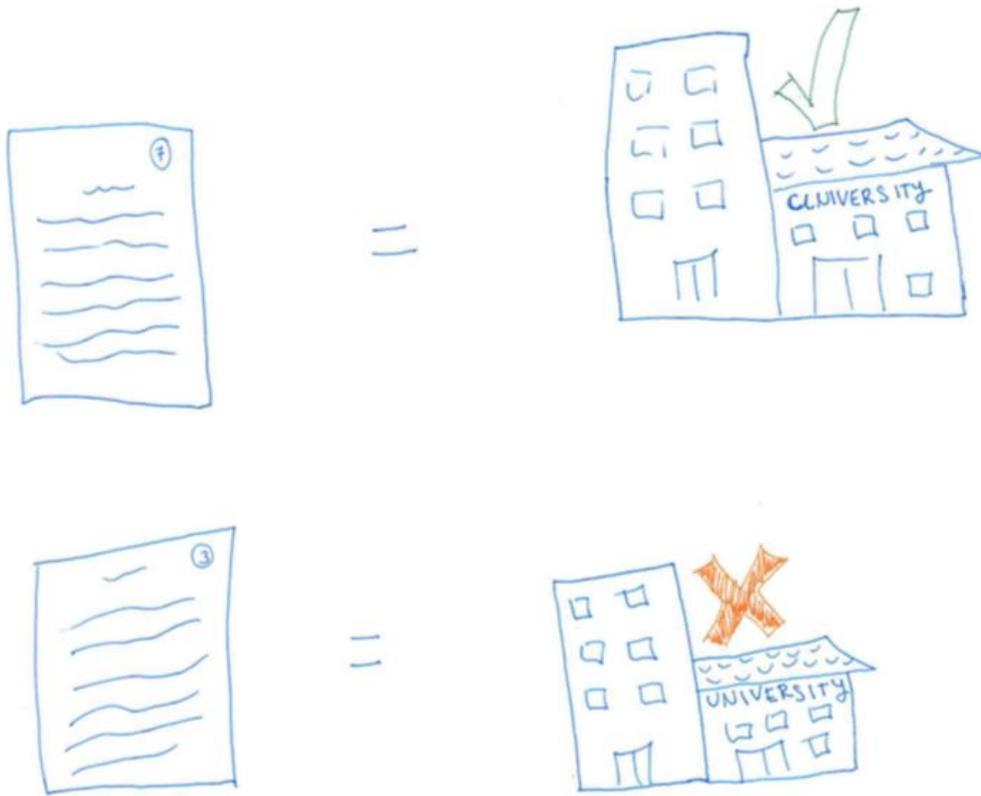


Figure 12. Ella’s most stressful aspect of the middle school to high school transition—
university acceptance.

In summary, there were several factors that affected the perceived academic stress of the students in my PAR: increased homework, faster instruction, harder and more frequent assessments, obsessing about grades and how that will impact university admittance. The increased homework load was causing students to stay busier longer and as a consequence was causing them to sleep less, which added stress to their lives. The faster pace of instruction was difficult to transition to since this also increases the number of assessments students have in high school. As a consequence of the faster pace and more assessments, more emphasis was placed on grades and being successful which creates a more stressful environment when comparing high school to middle school. The grades that students achieve now count towards university acceptance, unlike in middle school. The synthesis of all these academic stressors created an environment for students transitioning to high school that is trying.

Time Management

Time management was the second most common theme, and several sub-themes emerged as I coded my interview transcripts. These sub-themes were finding a balance between after-school activities and academics, finding enough time to sleep, and dealing with the lack of free time.

The ISB is known by many who work at the school as “I S Busy” because there are so many activities, sports, and courses on offer for students to take. In middle school, students are limited in the number of sports and activities they can participate in and their course selection is more limited. When students reach high school, many are overwhelmed with the amount of choice they have in their extra-curricular activities and the variety of academic courses on offer. In addition to more choice, the academic pressures cause students to spend more time focusing on their academic achievement, which makes managing their time between their personal life and school difficult.

Balance between activities and academics. The main time management issue for the students in the CPR group was finding a healthy balance between their after-school activities and their academic classes. In middle school, students are limited to the number of sports and activities in which they can participate. There is also a limited number of sports and activities offered in the middle school, and thus, students welcome the transition because there are more after-school opportunities in which to participate. In addition, the participation hours tend to be longer and more frequent for these sports and activities; with an increased workload, students struggle to manage their time. As a result, students start to notice that they are sleeping less, staying up later, and that they have less free time for themselves.

Niran found there to be too many options for activities when he got to high school. He said in our second interview that “You want to be club officer, you want to be in CC, you want to get into IASIS. In order to do well, you have to work hard. So, then there is also the pressure of I won’t finish my work on time” (PAR Cycle 1, October 31, 2017). He continued:

My challenges now are setting my priorities, even though I have a system it is very vague. I don’t have a strong enough system. I have a World Scholar’s Cup trip to Yale next week, and I have to study for it, but then, I’m like, I want to play badminton, so I prioritize badminton over which is obviously not as important, so that’s what happens is priority issues.” (PAR Cycle 1, October 31, 2017)

As the ninth-grade counselor Gary said:

There are a lot of kids, especially boys, who don’t manage their time that well. Girls tend to be more organized and more mature at that age, right? Boys tend to be all over the place, and it’s a real challenge. You can just look into a ninth-grade boys backpack and see what the chances are of their success in being organized. (PAR Cycle 1, November 10, 2017)

Sleep. Students in the CPR group expressed frustration that they were not sleeping enough. Hana complained in her second interview, as she described her drawing (see Figure 13), saying that “I have to spend more time studying than having relaxing time” (PAR Cycle 1, October 30, 2017).



Figure 13. Hana's drawing of the most stressful aspect of the middle school to high school transition.

Akhari regretted that she did not have more free time to spend with her friends and relaxing. In our second interview, she said “I also want to take some rest time. Watching TV or YouTube. I go to sleep late, and the school bus comes at 6:15 AM so I have to wake up at 5:00 AM, so I need my sleep” (PAR Cycle 1, November 1, 2017). The high school counselors are aware of this and are trying to support the students. Gary mentioned in our interview that you hear of ninth graders that are getting five hours of sleep. It is so not good and so unhealthy and so unproductive. I try to help them to try to figure out how to get organized and check in with the ones that are disorganized.” (PAR Cycle 1, November 10, 2017)

Social Pressures

The third major theme that emerged was dealing with social pressures, which means pressure that students feel from their peers to be successful. The sub-themes that appeared here were finding new friends and old friendships changing peer competition in an academic setting, and internal pressure that students placed on themselves to succeed.

In August 2017, the students reported only two instances of the changing friend dynamic among the students in my CPR group while in the November interviews, that issue was mentioned nine times. Akhari was one of the students who suggested that finding new friends was a challenge in August. She said that “in the beginning of high school, it was very sad for me. I did not like my classmates in the beginning” (PAR Cycle 1, August 31, 2017). Niran was more aware of his social surroundings and concerned about how his friends saw him once he arrived in high school. Regarding decisions he made in school from the classes he took to the activities he participated in he would ask himself, “if I do this, will my friends like me” (PAR Cycle 1, October 31, 2017)? Niran mentioned that his biggest stressors in high school were an increase in his workload and the social issues he encountered with friends. He said, “I wrote a pie chart because there are many things that stress me out. These two are the

biggest things that stress me out” (PAR Cycle 1, October 31, 2017). Figure 14 shows Niran’s concerns and illustrates that working for school was even more stressful than the peer pressure of a social life.

Ji Su mentioned in our November interview that she was most stressed about her grades and wanted “to kind of change my friend group. My current friend group is really nice, but I want to be friends with more people, but I don’t get to do that” (PAR Cycle 1, November 1, 2017). In Figure 15, she expressed the biggest stressors she had encountered in the middle school to high school transition. When I asked the high school counselor, Gary, about the challenges with the transition he specifically mentioned friendships. He said these students have middle school friendships that are “still fluid, kids are goofy, making friends, losing friends, there is a lot of drama that spills over from the middle school years” (PAR Cycle 1, November 10, 2017).

Social pressure about grades and performance came as a surprise to me. In the initial interviews from August, academic peer pressure was only mentioned once while in the November interviews, there were 12 mentions of social peer pressure—especially when it came to academic stress. Akhari said to me that “new students also think they want to be more good than me” (PAR Cycle 1, November 1, 2017) when it came to their grades and later lamented “yes, kind of a competition. I have to keep studying” (PAR Cycle 1, November 1, 2017). Niran bluntly said, “there is a lot of competition in our high school” (PAR Cycle 1, October 31, 2017) when it came to academics. He worried that he would not do well enough on assessments to “compete” (PAR Cycle 1, October 31, 2017) with his peers. Ji Su explained the academic atmosphere in high school in the following way: “everyone is taking it really seriously. In middle school, they were like, eh, we can just try our best. Now, everyone is preparing for it; everyone is really ready for it” (PAR Cycle 1, November 1, 2017). When I asked her how this peer competition made her feel, she simply



Figure 14. Niran's drawing of his biggest stressors in the middle school to high school transition.



Figure 15. Ji Su's drawing of the biggest stressors she has encountered in the middle school to high school transition.

said, “I feel pressured” (PAR Cycle 1, November 1, 2017). Harry, one of the high school counselors, had a really unique perspective on this peer academic pressure at the ISB. He said, “a lot of them are quite self-motivated because of the environment they are in. It’s not necessarily the parents that are putting pressure on them; it’s almost like a competition within the grade of being successful” (PAR Cycle 1, November 7, 2017). He continued, “Yes, they might be self-motivated in this competition, to an extent that is healthy, but it can be quite unhealthy if it is taken to an extreme” (PAR Cycle 1, November 7, 2017).

In some of the interviews, the academic peer pressure to succeed was increasing the internal pressure that students experienced to do well. Niran mentioned in our November interview that he experiences internal pressure to succeed: “It’s the pressure to do well. I so want to do well” (PAR Cycle 1, October 31, 2017). Ji Su also experienced pressure to succeed from within, saying, “I think it comes from myself. I question myself a lot to get good grades” (PAR Cycle 1, November 1, 2017). She indicated that it was “just my personality” (PAR Cycle 1, November 1, 2017). Ella thought that her peers made her internalize her pressure to succeed more. When asking her whether she felt pressure from her peers to be successful at the ISB, she said, “Sometimes. There are some people in some of my classes that are just like really smart. It’s not really pressure from them, like seeing how good they are and putting pressure on myself” (PAR Cycle 1, November 8, 2017). Juanita, one of the ninth-grade counselors, said this internal pressure was one of the reasons the transition from middle school to high school was so difficult. Her response to how she counsels these students to temper their expectations was heartfelt during our interview. She said,

Their expectations are really high for themselves. They don’t do as well. A lot of ninth graders came in saying I’m going to get straight sevens, or at least all sixes and sevens and that’s not realistic. You and I know that. They didn’t know that. Whatever the highest scores you can get in middle school is not even a letter grade, it’s exceeding, or whatever, it’s apples and oranges you know. So that’s been an awakening for the ninth-grade kids, and it’s also an adjusting, right? Figuring out,

okay that I need to go easier on myself and not have my expectations set that are unrealistic. Still, need to push myself, but not be unrealistic. (Juanita, PAR Cycle 1, November 1, 2017)

Student-Teacher Relationships

The final theme that came from the CPR interviews was teacher-student relationships. Students seemed to appreciate the higher expectations but yearned for the more personal relationships they had with their middle school teachers. The sub-themes that were apparent in the discussions were that high school teachers were stricter than middle school teachers, high school teachers had higher standards for academic work than middle school teachers, and those high school teachers were more challenging to get to know than their middle school counterparts.

Before I started the interviews with my students, I thought that most of them would say that high school is more difficult than middle school. I was surprised to learn from them that the way they perceived their teachers was different than their middle school teachers (Memo, September 15, 2017). Akhari mentioned in our first interview that the most significant difference between middle school and high school “is the teachers” (PAR Cycle 1, August 31, 2017). Students mentioned twice that their high school teachers were stricter, and four times it was mentioned that high school teachers had higher standards in the August interviews. When comparing his middle school teachers to his high school teachers, Virote said: “I think the expectations are definitely higher” (PAR Cycle 1, September 1, 2017). Lily mentioned that teachers were “more strict so if you don’t do your homework or bring it in the next day you get mandatory study hall” (PAR Cycle 1, September 4, 2017). In my interview with Niran in August 2017, he said “high school teachers have higher expectations. They expect you to not talk; they expect you to do well, while in middle school they would not get mad at something you would do, in high school they would” (PAR Cycle 1, September 4,

2017). By the time I met with the students in November most of the students were well into a routine and did not mention that their teachers were stricter or had higher standards.

However, they did mention that it was more challenging to get to know their high school teachers. In August, this was said four times, and in November it was mentioned twice, which indicates that it is still a problem for some students four months into the school year. Paul was blunt about his experience with his ninth-grade teachers when we first met saying, “high school teachers don’t really care who you are as long as you make good grades” (PAR Cycle 1, November 1, 2017). Ji Su was dejected when I asked her about her high school teachers. She said, “I feel a gap between the teachers. I don’t really feel very comfortable” (PAR Cycle 1, November 1, 2017). Kiet thought her high school teachers were more formal than her middle school teachers. She said, “It’s not like high school teachers don’t joke around with students. But there is this kind of sense that you are more grown up now, the teachers are more serious” (PAR Cycle 1, September 1, 2017). Akhari thought that her high school teachers were as kind as her middle school teachers, but she said: “I don’t know how to be close with them” (PAR Cycle 1, August 31, 2017). When I asked her if it was important to have a close relationship with her teachers she replied, “Yes. This year I have really did not asked any questions to teachers. Last year my teachers report to me said that I always asked many good questions, but this year I didn’t asked questions” (PAR Cycle 1, August 31, 2017). Emily helped to put this difference between middle school and high school teachers into perspective for me as a high school teacher. She said that students connect better with middle school teachers because they had fewer classroom preparations than high school teachers and had more time to get to know their students (PAR Cycle 1, November 28, 2017).

Implications

My learning as a part of this Participatory Action Research (PAR) project has shown me that the transition from middle school to high school at the ISB is not an equitable experience for the students involved. All of the students in my CPR group expressed that the transition has been challenging, especially at first. Once the students were four months into ninth grade, a lot of the pressure had subsided as students gained more exposure in high school and settled into their routines. However, the different nationalities in my CPR group experienced transition stress in different ways.

Japanese Students

Academic stress and time management have been the most difficult aspects of the transition to date. The two Japanese students in my PAR have found it difficult to balance school with their Japanese studies. Both Akhari and Hana have said that they would transfer from the ISB in early 2018 and are preparing for entrance exams back in Japan. In addition to being a second language learner at the ISB, Akhari was also struggling to master Japanese prior to transferring back to Japan. In her free time, she had to study Japanese and mathematics in her native tongue. She mentioned that “it is very hard for me to learn Japanese—I cannot stand Japanese. It is so difficult, and I am already busy” (PAR Cycle 1, November 1, 2017). Hana was also preparing for entrance exams for her return to Japan. More specifically, she was feeling pressure from the teachers at the school in Japan where her parents wanted her to go to do well on her entrance exams. She said in our last interview, “The teacher wants me to get into a school, so they pressure me to study more and more” (PAR Cycle 1, October 31, 2017). Gary, one of the high school counselors also touched on this in our conversation. He said,

The Japanese kids, there is a language issue often, just because many of the Japanese students came to ISB later than other kids. They don't have the English level that the other kids have. So, they are struggling to keep up. They have a tremendous work ethic,

in general, they have to because to do a 10-page reading takes twice as long as it does for those better in English. (PAR Cycle 1, November 10, 2017)

In my experience with the other nationalities in the CPR group, none of them mentioned external work in their native language or entrance exams this early in high school. This shows me that the Japanese at the ISB do not have an equitable transition experience based on their late learning of English and the exterior exams they have to prepare for study in Japan (Memo, December 1, 2017).

Korean Students

Gary continued:

The Korean kids, a lot of pressure on them from the get-go. In general, a lot of parents are looking closely to their grades. It's hard to satisfy their parent's expectations so they are under a lot of pressure. A lot of them are highly successful, but the ones that are less successful have a real difficulty in keeping their self-esteem. Too much self-esteem in my opinion, is attached with Korean kids is tied to their scores. (PAR Cycle 1, November 10, 2017)

When I spoke with Ji Su about her experience in the transition from middle school to high school, she said that her mother told her "high school really matters when you go to university" (PAR Cycle 1, November 1, 2017). In our initial interview two weeks into school, she was already talking about her grades and going to university: "To go to Korean university, my grades, like all my scores, my grades, my homework has to be perfect" (PAR Cycle 1, September 6, 2017). Her mother was also applying pressure at home to get top marks by saying "you have to get everything perfect, like all sevens, and I kind of have pressure because of that" (PAR Cycle 1, September 6, 2017). She lamented that her other friends who are not Korean were "studying more than like in middle school, but they are not as strict as Koreans" (PAR Cycle 1, September 6, 2017). This additional intense pressure from home I did not see in the Japanese, Thai, and Americans in the CPR group. It was evident talking to the students that all of their parents cared, but only Ji Su had parents that were expecting all sevens and perfection. This is not an equitable transition for the students in

the Korean community at the ISB (Memo, December 1, 2017). In PAR Cycle 2, I further tracked this to see whether this assertion was indeed true since there was only one Korean in our PAR.

Thai Students

Gary also gave his opinion on the Thai students at the ISB, saying:

The Thai kids, it's different for boys and girls actually. The expectations are high for the girls. They are expected to work their tails off and they do. They tend to do pretty well. Boys are all over the place. Some of them are quite spoiled. Their grades can be anywhere and it's probably okay with many of the Thai parents with boys, they are pampered, they are treated special. Most of them are nice kids (PAR Cycle 1, November 10, 2017).

Virote, one of the Thai males in the CPR group, said in both interviews that he feels fine with the transition and was only bothered by the size of the high school at first and finding his classes (PAR Cycle 1, November 24, 2017). Niran, another Thai male, said "my family has a belief that you have to get okay grades at least. I am not as pressured as others might think Asian kids might be" (PAR Cycle 1, September 4, 2017). Sunan, the last Thai male in the group, stated that he did not experience any pressure to succeed, but does experience pressure to be more organized (PAR Cycle 1, November 27, 2017). Dao, a female in the CPR group, said that she was happy with her grades, but stated "I can bring them up" (PAR Cycle 1, November 3, 2017) indicating to me that she could do better. Kiet only spoke about feeling more pressure to complete her homework on time. The Thai students have the luxury of attending an international school in their home country and do not have to worry about cultural and language issues like other nationalities is a huge advantage for them (Memo, November 2, 2017). As Gary pointed out, the males in the CPR group did not seem to be experiencing pressure from home, but I did not gather that the young Thai women in our CPR were feeling pressure from home either. By experiencing this transition from middle school to high school in their home country, Thais have an advantage over the other nationalities (Memo, November 5, 2017).

American Students

Gary had this to say about the American students at the ISB in general:

Americans are a tough group to define specifically. It is a hard question. I think that actually the most positive thing I can say about the American kids, it's kind of more than the other three groups, I think the parents' kind of leave the ball in the kid's court a little bit more. So that the kid, if motivated to do really well and tackle a specific subject they are free to do that. Parents let them do that a little bit more than the other cultures. Parents are all over the spectrum in terms of expectations for their kids. (PAR Cycle 1, November 10, 2017)

From my two interviews with the Americans in my CPR group, I can say that Gary is correct in stating that the Americans are hard group to define (Memo, December 1, 2017). Emily and Lily were concerned about their GPAs but noted parental pressure (PAR Cycle 1, November 28, 2017). Emily was concerned about her GPA but spoke of parental pressure to do well (PAR Cycle 2, November 28, 2017). Paul seemed to struggle in school and did not express any pressure from home to do well in school (PAR Cycle 1, September 4, 2017).

The structure in place that students found the most helpful with the transition was Freshman Seminar. This is a mandatory course for all ninth-grade students to attend that helps them with transition issues going into high school. This course is taught by the ninth-grade counselors and each student in the CPR group found something useful from the experience. One of the main weaknesses in the transition process was the current Advisory program. Only two students found the Advisory program useful, while the other ten did not have a favorable opinion of the Advisory program.

Theme Significance from PAR Cycle 1

Looking back at my literature review, some elements support what I have seen with the transition experience that my CPR group was facing. Perry and Pauletti (2011) wrote that adolescents are coping with sudden changes to their bodies, controlling their sexual interests, developing new relationships with peers while determining their academic and professional futures. The students in my CPR group were either 13 or 14 years old and were in the later

stages of puberty. All of them spoke of the academic challenges they faced, and many were struggling with making new friends in high school (Memo, December 2, 2017). Armstrong (2006) wrote that adolescents tend to try to find their identity by interacting with people of significant interest who are around them during this intensely social time in their lives when young adults are looking for a sense of belonging, community, social status, and emotional closeness. Each student in my CPR was involved in an after-school activity when they were interviewed, and each student spoke about how they enjoyed participating in their activities even though it made managing their time more difficult (Memo, December 2, 2017).

Roybal et al. (2014) found that competent teachers and a healthy school climate are important in the experience students have when transitioning from middle school to high school. Roybal et al. (2014) stated that caring and accommodating teachers are more likely to ease this difficult transition, which is what I found with my CPR group. Several of the students thought having a close relationship with their high school teachers was important to them (Memo, December 1, 2017). Ellerbrock et al. (2015) found that teachers and parents tend to put more responsibility on students once they reach high school, which is what I found in speaking with my CPR group. Not every student experienced pressure from home, but every student did express the belief that their classes were more difficult and that teachers had higher expectations for them academically (Memo, December 2, 2017). Roybal et al. (2014) found that ninth graders experience a lack of intimacy and connectedness when they enter high school, and I found this with my CPR group since they mentioned this as one of their primary stressors.

In addition to these developmental changes, children in school also experience pressure to achieve. Li (2012) stated that competition in East Asia is the most intense in the world and that a high priority is placed on education in Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) countries like Japan and Korea. Tan and Yates (2010) found that high academic expectations

are placed on students in East Asian cultures from their parents and teachers, which can lead to excessive stress. In CHC cultures, perceived stress from students comes mainly from two sources: from within and from their teachers and parents as Zhang et al. (2016) stated. I found this to be true with the Korean and Japanese students in the CPR group. Genshaft and Broyles stated that students of these nationalities reported that academic problems are the most common cause of stress in adolescents—especially since they spend a substantial amount of time within school environments (as cited in Tan & Yates, 2010).

In Japan, entrance into a good high school is considered the initial step in obtaining a successful career (Koizumi, 1995). Both Akhari and Hana spoke about the pressure placed on them to succeed at the ISB so they could transfer back to a good school in Japan. Academic stress is one of two most severe types of stress encountered by Japanese middle school students—along with interpersonal relationships with their peers. White (1993) wrote that Japanese adolescents appear to be very cognizant of their emerging sense of self and the demands of belonging to a group.

New questions were beginning to emerge for me after PAR Cycle 1. As I mentioned earlier, my biggest surprise in doing this action research has been the amount of peer pressure placed on students to succeed which in turn has created more internal pressure on the students to do well even if they were not from a Confucius Heritage Culture (Memo, December 2, 2017). Another emerging question is having social relationships with students of the opposite sex. This is something that Gary, the ninth-grade counselor pointed out to me in our interview. He mentioned that the ISB is his seventh international school, and he finds the students here to be worldly but naïve. As he put it, “you can hand them a passport and tell them to go take a flight to Vietnam, and they’d have no problem getting to the airport and taking a plane even if they don’t speak Thai” (PAR Cycle 1, November 10, 2017).

Continuing, he said,

They are very naïve and innocent in terms of relationships. You don't see too many kids here in serious relationships with a partner. Most of the kids don't have time to have a boyfriend or girlfriend, and it's kind of interesting. (PAR Cycle 1, November 10, 2017)

One other question that emerged was why students experience the need to be so involved and busy in school. Busyness was almost like a badge of honor, and students bragged about how busy they were (Memo, November 10, 2017).

My research sub-question asked how my participation in the action research project enhances my leadership practices. My involvement in this PAR has helped me to see the students from a different perspective. I am not seen as a teacher to them, but as someone who is trying to help their fellow students understand the difficulty in the transition from middle school to high school. Being a good listener is essential to be a good leader. Understanding people is vital in order to make the educational experience better for everyone involved. Capturing the voice of the students in the PAR will benefit future students at the ISB and in other international schools around the world potentially. This PAR has also opened up communication between me and the high school counselors. My interactions with them in the past have been about individual students and not the students as a whole. It has also helped me to understand their job better and what the demands are on their time. Without being a part of this PAR, I would not realize the difficulty of their job and the politics that are involved with decisions at the ISB. Being a part of this PAR has made me appreciate the importance of communication and how politics play a role in the education that students receive.

My ECU professors helped me to find a different way of reaching my CPR group outside of traditional interviews and surveys when they suggested that I ask the students and counselors to draw the most stressful aspect of the transition from middle school to high school. I noticed an immediate difference in the depth of the answers students provided from our first interview and how the drawings made the conversation more personal and

welcoming. I found the use of memoing to be valuable during the meetings as these memo notes helped to create the questions for the second round of interviews I had in November 2017 with the students in my CPR group.

PAR Cycle 2 Plans

The findings and reflections from this chapter helped to guide me in how I approached the second round of action research. I was curious to see how students perceived academic stress in the second semester of their ninth-grade year. I wanted to know whether they were still having time management issues, and I wanted to explore the strategies that students had developed to reach their academic goals. I was curious about how the relationships with their teachers changed in the second semester, especially in science where they take semester-long courses (Memo, December 2, 2017). I also looked into the interpersonal relationships between the students and their friends in the second semester. I wanted to know whether and how their friendship groups evolved since our November meeting. I also looked into how parental pressure changed once the semester scores were released. I also tried to see if I could find unique cultural problems that I had not encountered in my literature review, especially for the Thai students since I was unable to find any academic cultural information on them regarding academic transitions.

In PAR Cycle 2, I met one-on-one with the students to interview them about their transition. These interviews were audio-recorded, and I once again transcribed the interviews and coded them for analysis. I was interested in using Photo Voice in my next round of interviews, which allowed students to take a photo of what they thought was the most stressful part of the transition in the second semester of their ninth-grade year and explain why this photo was taken in our second-semester interview.

Summary

In PAR Cycle 1, I met with the student members of the PAR in a series of two interviews to learn about how they individually experienced the transition from middle school to high school at the ISB. The first interview consisted of getting to know the students and earning their trust while also seeing what their perceived stressors were early in ninth grade. In the second interview, I asked students to draw a picture of the most stressful aspect of the middle school to high school transition and then they had to answer questions regarding their drawing. The high school counselors in the PAR were interviewed once and were also asked to draw what they thought the most stressful aspect of the middle school to high school transition for students was and where they fit into the picture as a ninth-grade counselor.

Several themes emerged after the PAR interviews were finished. The first major theme was academic stress in terms of more homework, faster pace of learning, more summative assessments, more difficult course work, grades, class rank, and future acceptance into university. The second major theme was time management where students found difficulty in balancing school activities with academic demands, lack of sleep due to increased workload, and lack of free time. The third major theme was social pressures due to changing friendships, peer competition, and internal pressure to succeed. The final major theme was teacher/student relationships. High school teachers were perceived to be stricter, to have higher standards, and to be more difficult to get to know than their middle school peers.

CHAPTER 6: PAR CYCLE 2

Introduction

In PAR Cycle 2, I continued to follow the 12 students in the CPR group at the ISB to better understand how they were experiencing the psychological and socio-cultural transitions from middle school to high school. With the exit of one student (Dao), in PAR Cycle 2, the number of participants was reduced to 11; this number was further reduced early in PAR Cycle 2 when Virote removed himself from the study. I engaged the students in a Photovoice data collection activity dealing with their most significant individual stressors as of February 2018, continued analytic memoing, and conducted an analysis of three weekly diaries of two Japanese females and one Thai male. Through these, I was able to collect and analyze evidence that supported a deeper understanding of the transitions experience.

In this chapter, I provide a brief transition from Chapter 5 and state the key leadership actions of the CPR and myself. In this chapter, I also explain the key findings from the group analysis of the Photovoice data collection activity in which each participant was asked to take a photo of the most stressful aspect of the middle school to high school transition and provide a caption as to why this was the most stressful aspect of the transition for them. In small groups, we then co-analyzed the photos, excluding the individual captions, to analyze and reach consensus themes that the images displayed. I then provide the findings from this Photovoice activity and analyze what the existing literature says about the findings. In addition to this analysis of evidence, I examine these findings in light of organizational theory and how that contributes to my understanding of how the dynamics of the ISB has affected the PAR project. Finally, I analyze how my view of leadership has changed and how my teaching and leadership practices are different as a result of this work. In conclusion, I summarize Chapter 6 and transition into the final cycle of the research, PAR Cycle 3.

Process Behind PAR Cycle 2

In Chapter 5, I wrote about the selection process for the 12 students in the CPR group and analyzed the responses of students in understanding better the most common stressors they had encountered in the transition as of the fall semester of 2017. Three high school counselors also took part in this CPR group. PAR Cycle 1 laid the groundwork for PAR Cycle 2 in which I identified the key leadership actions of the CPRs in PAR Cycle 2: data for setting meetings, the process and results of the analyzing photos using Photovoice, and the discussion with ECU professors about the data and next steps.

Meetings in PAR Cycle 2

On February 21, 2018, I emailed the students in the CPR group, to request that students send me a photo of the most stressful aspect of the transition from middle school to high school along with a caption of why this photo represented the most stressful part of the transition. Three groups of students met on three consecutive days (Feb 26-28, 2018). The Day 1 group consisted of Ella, Ji Su, and Lily; they were the first group to analyze the photos. The Day 2 grouping of Emily, Hana, Paul, Sunan, and Niran, and the Day 3 grouping of Akhari and Kiet analyzed them next. Virote was the last student who I met with in PAR Cycle 1 (PAR Cycle 1); he was difficult to schedule time to meet. In this cycle, I was proactive in emailing him, and he agreed to meet with a group of his peers on Tuesday, February 27, 2018. Unfortunately, Virote did not attend this meeting and missed the opportunity to discuss this transition in PAR Cycle 2. He removed himself from this project, reducing the student CPR group to ten participants.

Photo Observation and Analysis

Photovoice is a process in which people of limited power, use photo images or video to capture facets of their experience and environment to share with others (Wang & Burris, 1997). Using Photovoice gives the students, who are experiencing the high school transition

and have limited voice in how that transition is constructed, a way to share their experiences, feelings, and ideas. I anonymously displayed the ten photos on the white board at the front of the classroom, numbered one through ten to make it easier to discuss the pictures as a group. Each of the three groups took a gallery walk and viewed each photo and took notes on each picture. Once the students had viewed and made notes of each photo, I facilitated a discussion that was audio-recorded as they analyzed their gallery walk notes. I asked a series of questions to start the analysis of the photos, and each student responded with his or her interpretation. I was curious to understand what themes they saw in the photos and whether they were surprised by any of the displayed pictures. Appendix C provides the questions. In these small groups, the students drew out themes from the photos about the stressors they were experiencing and saw represented by others. After a lengthy discussion, the groups reached a consensus about emerging themes related to the primary stressors in the transition from middle school to high school, which I discuss in the next section. I then asked a series of follow-up questions. After listening to their discussions, I wanted to know more about their transitions to date. What had they been surprised about by the transition and how did their friends in their nationality group feel about the transition? I was also curious to know whether they experienced pressure to succeed and from where this pressure originated. Students at the ISB are usually heavily involved in after-school activities, and so I asked how each student was dealing with managing time. Appendix C provides my follow up questions to this Photovoice data collection.

After I completed PAR Cycle 2, I met the two professors from East Carolina University (ECU) on Thursday, March 1, 2018, and discussed my results with them. I spoke about how I was intrigued by the answers and photos that the Japanese students, and one Thai male gave. My professors suggested that I add an additional set of evidence to PAR Cycle 2. I asked these students to keep a weekly diary in which they would chronicle their weekly

activities by writing down what they did and what they had to sacrifice to accomplish this. The students kept a detailed diary on Google docs of their experiences over the course of a week.

The reflections from three students led to a deeper understanding of what a week in student life looks like regarding workload and decisions they had to make to complete this workload. While I read these diary reflections, I wrote analytical memos on my impressions and wrote additional memos once I had coded the weekly diary reflections. In the next section, I present the emerging themes for PAR Cycle 2.

Emerging Themes

Using Photovoice as a tool to express the difficulties with transitioning from middle school to high school provided a different way to collect evidence and yielded these emerging themes: academic stress, time management, social pressures, and teacher-student relationships. The analysis of the Photovoice showed the primary themes were: balance between school and activities, academic grades, increased school work, and internal pressure. In addition, I added the analysis of the Google diaries of the three students. In this analysis, these themes were evident: academic homework, ISB activities, and academics outside of the ISB.

Photovoice Analysis

Photography is a powerful way to express emotion and feelings, and a photograph can be interpreted to mean many different things. Photographs, often with captions, can be used to bring the photographers' reality to light to act as a catalyst to encourage policymakers to make changes (Wang & Burris, 1997).

During the three meetings with ten students, we discussed the photos they took to represent the most stressful aspect of the transition from middle school to high school. Despite meeting in three different small groups, each group had similar responses to the

photos when I asked for consensus themes: balance between activities and school work, academic grades, and the amount of school work. In Table 6, the tallies represent the consensus numbers from the total of ten students as they built a consensus about major themes. In the subsections, I discuss findings in each smaller group of students. All evidence is from Group A (February 26, 2018), Group B (February 27, 2018), and Group C (February 28, 2018).

Group A themes and consensus. Ella was the first to comment on the photos saying, “most of the photos are about school, studying, and grades” (PAR Cycle 2, February 26, 2018). Lily concurred saying, “I notice a theme of balancing grades and studying with Facebook and social media” (PAR Cycle 2, February 26, 2018). Ji Su also agreed stating, “I thought about time management, there is a picture of studying and grades, and academic things, and there is social media there” (PAR Cycle 2, February 26, 2018). Lily even commented that the photos were so similar, “they are all studying. It’s an imbalance. It’s hard to get good grades” (PAR Cycle 2, February 26, 2018). The three girls then talked among themselves and decided that the central themes from the pictures were balancing school, activities, and their social lives, the stress of getting good grades, and dealing with the quantity of school work. The girls then pointed out their photos and explained why each of their pictures demonstrated stressfulness.

Ji Su found the amount of school work, the number of assessments, and keeping up with her grades the most stressful. She lamented that “high school summative assessments are often; they are like every week” (PAR Cycle 2, February 26, 2018). She continued that, “after I moved to high school, I started to care a lot about my attendance. Last year I would go to the nurse’s office if my stomach hurt, now I have to go to class in order to catch up” (PAR Cycle 2, February 26, 2018). The stress is clearly still there and is affecting her physically, but she is in the mode of pushing through the anxiety that might be the cause.

Table 6

Summary of the Codes and Descriptions from the Three Group Meetings using Photovoice

Code	Description of Answers by Students	Tallies
SAS—BAL	Student Academic Stress Balance	7
SAS—AG	Student Academic Stress Academic Grades	6
SAS—SW	Student Academic Stress School Work	5
SAS—IP	Student Academic Stress Internal Pressure	1

Figure 16 is a screenshot of her current grades, which she used as her most stressful aspect of the transition between middle school and high school. Lily mentioned in her presentation of her photo that she had been “struggling with balancing all my homework this year with all of my after-school activities” (PAR Cycle 2, February 26, 2018). She bemoaned, “I did not anticipate how much homework there would be! I doubled my sciences this semester, and I’m like unbelievably busy” (PAR Cycle 2, February 26, 2018). In Figure 17 Lily’s photo used the images of her notebooks to indicate how she is managing those increased demands. In her caption she wrote that the photo represents “how I have been struggling with balancing all of my homework this year with all of my after-school activities” (PAR Cycle 2, February 26, 2018).

Ella was forthcoming with the explanation behind her photo in Figure 18. Ella said:

This photo shows what has been most stressful for me during my middle school to high school transition because it shows an example of some of the homework and studying I have had to do, which has been the most stressful part of this transition because the amount of studying I have to do in high school is a lot higher than it was in middle school, and figuring out the best ways to use my time while studying has been hard and stressful.” (PAR Cycle 2, February 26, 2018).

Like the other girls, the photos show dedication to being good students, but they focused on this external reward instead of some intrinsic motivation.

Thirty years have passed since I transitioned from middle school to high school, and I remember academic stress being a significant concern of mine back then. Prior to meeting with Group A, I assumed that they would submit photos of academic stressors, and these three students did do that. What I did not anticipate was the stress from the number of assessments students were now receiving in ninth grade. I believe I have been guilty of being caught up in my own subject and not realizing that ninth grade students have seven other subjects, which means they will have numerous formative and summative assessments in all their classes. I wonder why students were not assessed so frequently in eighth grade. It is also interesting that these three girls in Group A also had difficulty managing their time. It seems

Please check your demographics to ensure the information we have on file is correct.
 Click Here to see a list of all your past assignments for this term.

Grades and Attendance Standards Grades

High School Schedule

To Open the Report Card and other protected PDF file, please use password 19811MZf

[Download EAL Report here](#)

[Download your report card \(Grade 1-7\) for Semester 1 here](#)

Attendance By Class															
Exp	Last Week					This Week					Course	S1	S2	Absences	Tardies
	M	T	W	H	F	M	T	W	H	F					
1(A)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	String Orchestra Email Gricius, Adrianna G. - Rm: 8-123	7 7		0	0
1(A)	String Orchestra Email Gricius, Adrianna G. - Rm: 8-123		[i]	1	0
2(A)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	World Studies 9 Email Sheridan, Anthony J. - Rm: 3-320	6 7		1	0
2(A)	World Studies 9 Email Sheridan, Anthony J. - Rm: 3-320		[i] 5	0	0
2(A)											Physical Education 9	6		0	0

Figure 16. Ji Su’s photovoice: Grades as the most stressful aspect of the middle school to high school transition.

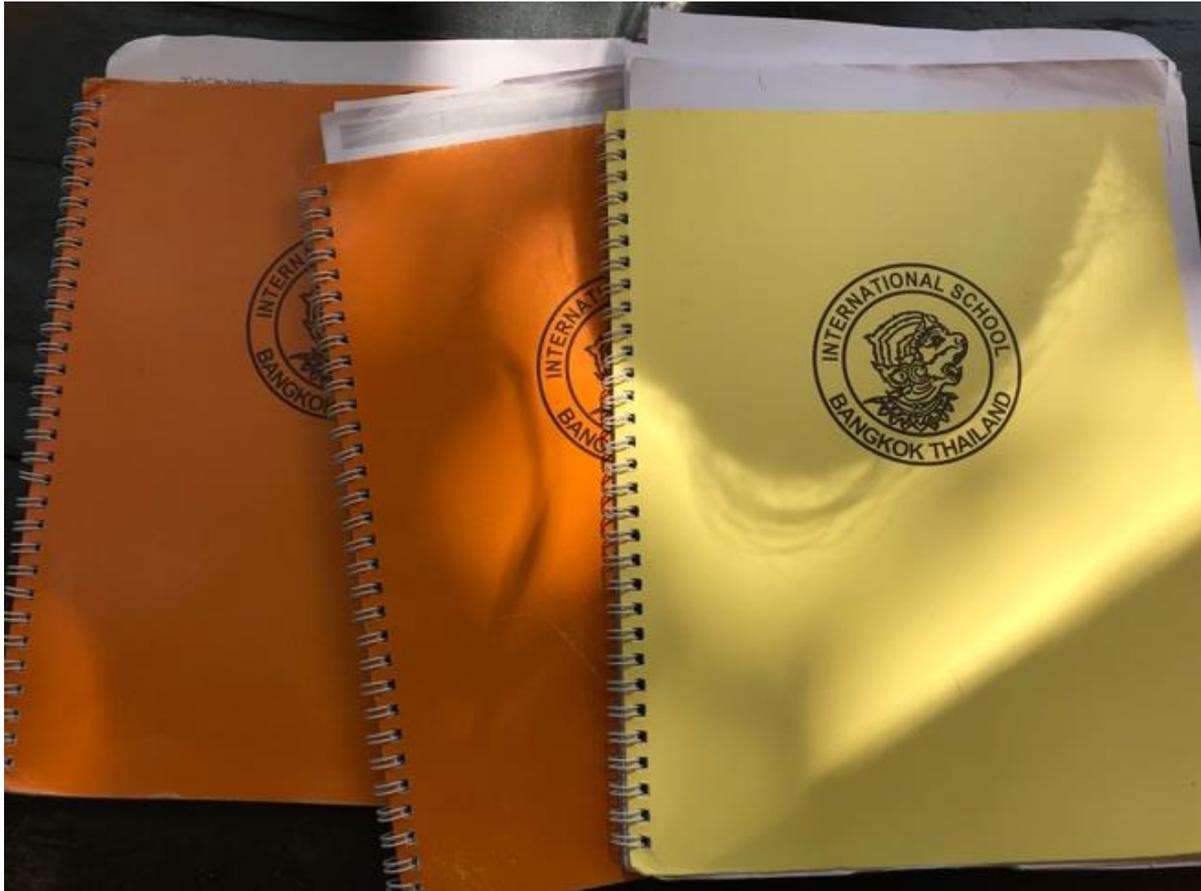


Figure 17. Lily's photovoice: Balance between homework and after-school activities as the most stressful aspect of the middle school to high school transition.

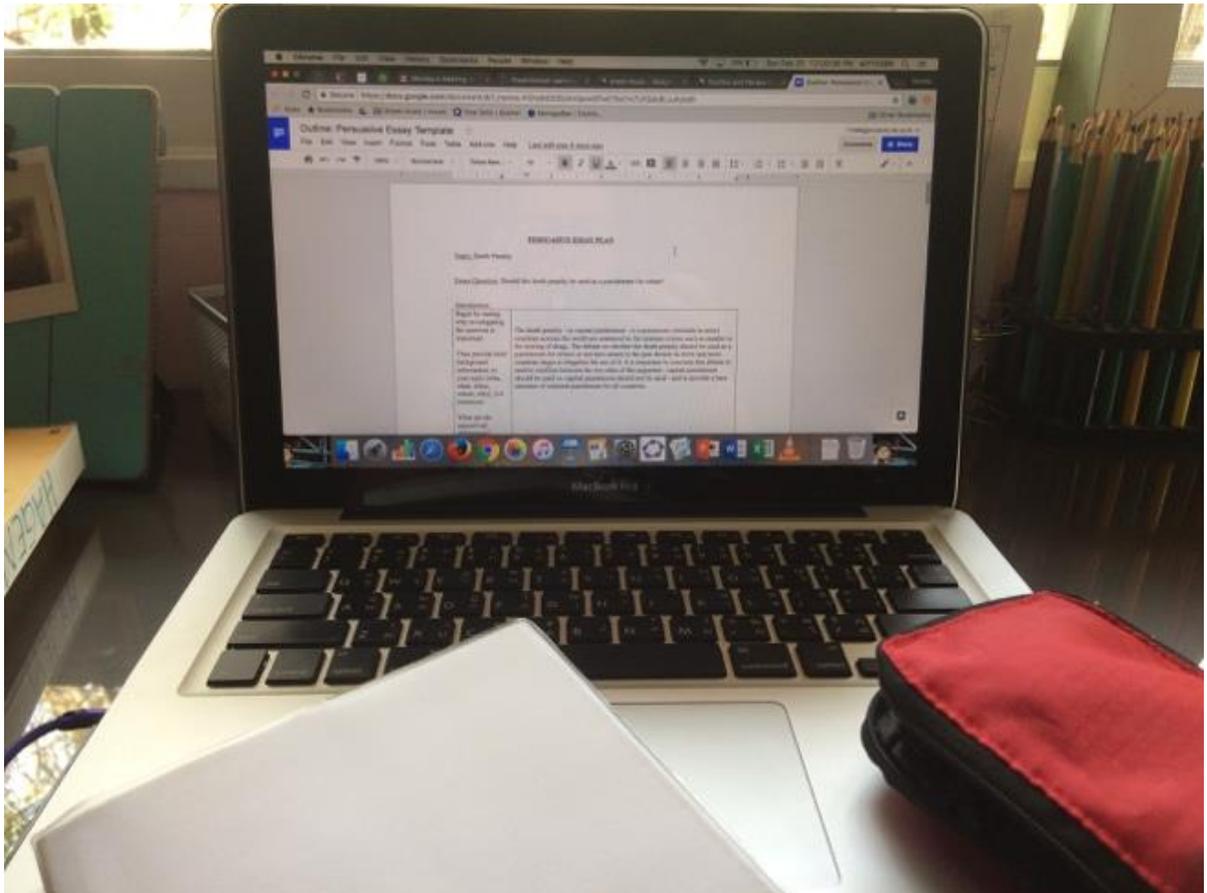


Figure 18. Ella's photovoice: Study time as the most stressful aspect of the middle school to high school transition.

the frequency of after school activities, along with an increase in the quantity of homework has been difficult for these students to adjust to. The high school should look at increasing communication between teachers regarding assessments and possibly look at limiting the amount of homework students receive in grade nine (Memo, February 26, 2018).

Group B themes and consensus. On Tuesday, February 27, I met with the largest of the three groups of students, which included Emily, Hana, Paul, Sunan, and Niran. These students entered my classroom and sat down so I could give them instructions on the data collection activity. The students took their gallery walk of the photos placed on the board and made notes while they were observing and analyzing each photo. After each student had returned to his or her seat, we then started to talk about their observations, which I audio-recorded.

Emily immediately said: “I kind of see that right now a lot of people are stressing about school and how much work we have” (PAR Cycle 2, February 27, 2018). Sunan agreed saying, “I see a lot of things related to school, like grades” (PAR Cycle 2, February 27, 2018). Niran said, “Several themes I have thought of before. I think we all have a bunch of common stresses that we all stress about in this school” (PAR Cycle 2, February 27, 2018). Paul mentioned that “they show a lot of things about grades” (PAR Cycle 2, February 27, 2018). Stress related to grades was a predominant theme. Although the photos were anonymous, students did talk directly about the photos they submitted. Hana had submitted a photo that was striking to me because it was identical to the picture that Ji Su presented and these two girls are of different nationalities and are only acquaintances (Memo, 2/27/2018). As you can see in Figure 19, it is a photo of Hana’s grades at the time of her participation in PAR Cycle 2. She explained to the group,

grades stress me out the most because I going to move back to Japan end of this year, and to get into new school I have to get good grades. So, my parents, mostly my mom, told me to get a good grade several times during this semester and whenever

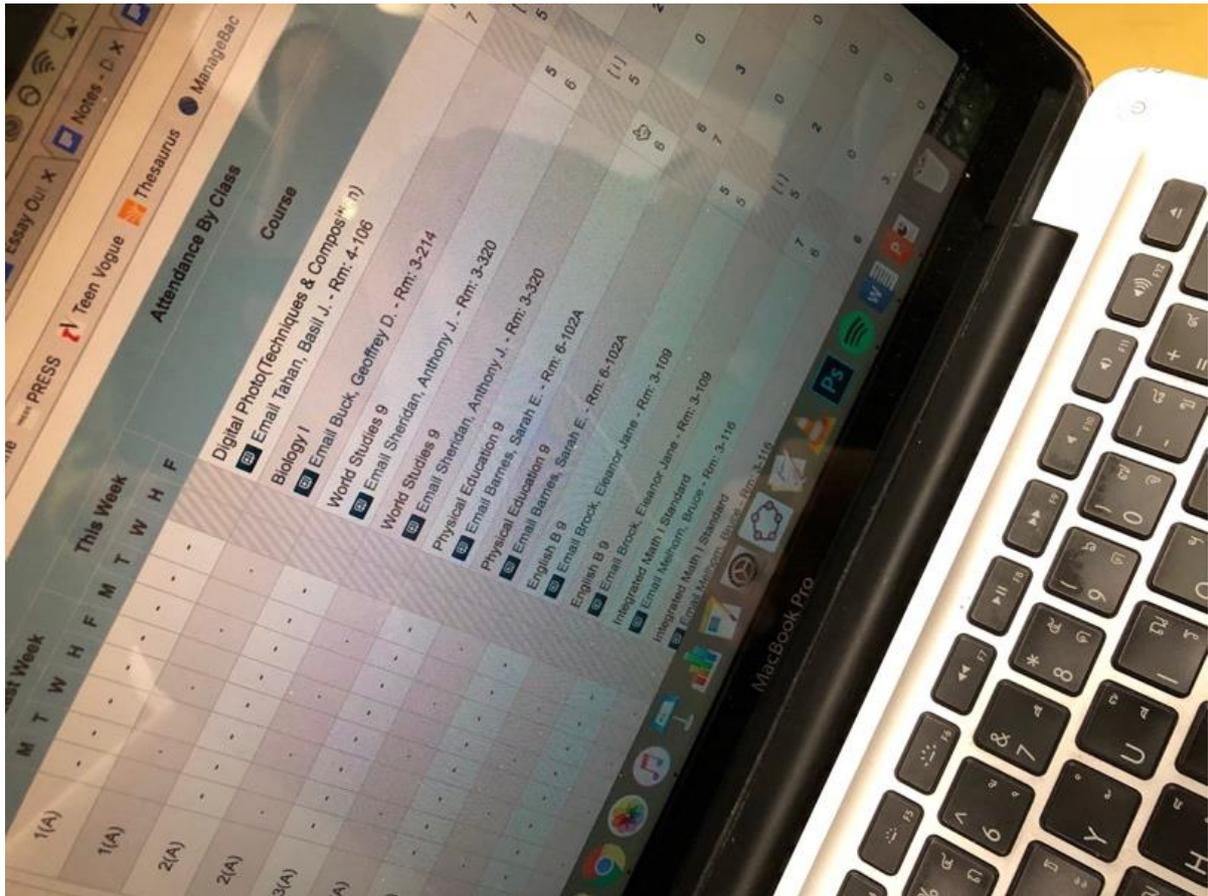


Figure 19. Hana’s photovoice: Grades as the most stressful aspect of the middle school to high school transition.

she says that I understand why she is saying and try to get good grades but at the same time it stress me out. (PAR Cycle 2, February 27, 2018)

The other students in this group submitted photos that they found online instead of taking a picture themselves. Sunan said about his photo of a bed that,

I chose this picture because over the transition to high school my sleep schedule has been very sporadic, which has direct effects on my performance in school and overall health. I've been quite stressed by both myself and my parents to catch enough sleep in order to improve my energy throughout the day. (PAR Cycle 2, February 27, 2018)

Paul talked about his photo of the world, which confused several students when they looked at it, by saying "This photo is supposed to represent World Studies. World Studies is the class that I feel like I have the most trouble in. World studies is the class that stresses me out" (PAR Cycle 2, February 27, 2018). Emily's photo was of a screenshot of a university application form where she said that thinking of applying to college and getting accepted is her most significant stress.

Niran had a photo that was a bit of an outlier among the other ten photos. He submitted a screenshot of the inbox of his email and had the following to say:

This may seem like an anticlimactic photo, but something that I found really stressful was the importance of checking digital means of communication such as email, Facebook, and Messenger. Before, although things like email were important, they were never this important. Missing or forgetting just one of these emails/messages could result in many huge problems for me. Today, an example of this occurred when I wasn't paying attention to these means of communication and forgot to take photos with my cc group, resulting in my teacher having to come find me. The number of things I have to remember each day stresses me out. (PAR Cycle 2, February 27, 2018)

When I asked the group to come up with a consensus about the photos Emily spoke first and said, "External views. Grades are what your friends, teachers see, and colleges see, it's like how you perform and how you're perceived" (PAR Cycle 2, February 27, 2018) to which Hana and Paul quickly agreed. Sunan then said, "I think there is sort of like a lot of pressure that people put on themselves in terms of grades. I guess they are constantly trying to improve it and it puts a lot of pressure on them" (PAR Cycle 2, February 27, 2018). He

continued that, “some of my friends have struggled to manage their time with assessments” (PAR Cycle 2, February 27, 2018) and indicated that school work and finding a balance at the ISB is difficult for many students. Niran said that among his Thai friends they “are pressured to do more and it is hard to manage our time since we want to do a lot of things” (PAR Cycle 2, February 27, 2018). As a group, they came to the same conclusion as Group A that academic grades, school work, and finding a balance are the central themes from the photos. However, they talked about this as pressure that is external and then it translated to the internal push to do well. The pressure caused a lack of sleep and lack of ability to keep up with friends; there was no relief from the constant pressure to do.

I was surprised that only Sunan mentioned sleep as an issue in the transition. It is a common occurrence to see students napping before school, and at different times of the day when they are not in class. The ISB even looked at changing the starting time of high school, but this was not possible due to the heavy traffic congestion in Bangkok later in the day. This group was also having difficulty managing their time between academics and activities. I was surprised to see that students in this group placed pressure on themselves to succeed. The pressure this group experienced seems to have shifted from external pressure of family and friends to internal pressure (Memo, February 27, 2018).

Group C themes and consensus. On February 28, 2018, Akhari and Kiet, repeated the gallery walk protocol by analyzing the photos and taking notes. Kiet was the first to speak, and the themes that jumped out to her were “academic. There is a Google Document, this is Chemistry, there are notebooks we normally write in, grades, grades” (PAR Cycle 2, February 28, 2018). Referring to all of the photos she said about high school, “it’s a bit stressful” (PAR Cycle 2, February 28, 2018). Akhari’s impression of the photos was “grades, studying a lot, stress in specific subjects, studying for university, sleeping and social media” (PAR Cycle 2, February 28, 2018). Kiet and Akhari then had to come to a consensus on what

the photos were showing, and they thought that finding a balance between school and personal life, along with grades and school work, were the dominant themes the images were displaying.

Akhari's photo was a screenshot of the word chemistry that she found online. I asked her to explain why chemistry represented the most stressful aspect of her transition and she said, "because it's a new subject, and I should learn many vocabularies. Also, my grade was bad, and I had many assessments for each unit" (PAR Cycle 2, February 28, 2018). I asked her to clarify why this was so difficult, and she said she was involved in after-school sports at the time and that it "was very hard to support my schedule. It takes time. After activities, I should go home, but traffic jam is very bad, so it took me two hours to get home and then do homework" (PAR Cycle 2, February 28, 2018). She summarized that finding a balance between school work, after-school activities, and studying Japanese along with adjusting to increased school work and worrying about grades was her biggest challenge in the transition.

Kiet submitted a personal photo of a climbing experience she had while on a Global Citizenship Week (GCW) trip to Indonesia in mid-February 2018, as Figure 20 shows. I asked her why this particular photo represented the most stressful aspect of the middle school to high school transition. She said that there were "higher expectations" in high school and that she "had never hiked before" and that she was "determined to make it to the top of the volcano and back down" (PAR Cycle 2, February 28, 2018) by herself. She continued that "it is representative of me trying to do my best and doing better than I can do. In a presentation, I might get an okay grade, but I am beating myself up that I could have done better" (PAR Cycle 2, February 28, 2018). She also confided that "coming from middle school, I had a responsibility problem" (PAR Cycle 2, February 28, 2018) and that she has struggled with an increase in assessments this year. For her, overcoming her self-doubt, becoming more responsible, and adjusting to the rise in school work had been her most significant challenges.



Figure 20. Kiet's photovoice: Increased responsibility as the most stressful aspect of the middle school to high school transition.

The photo of climbing is an analogy, but that level of creativity was uncommon among the photos. Most were direct representations of the stress to some part of their life such as grade list or notebooks. Even the student choices tended to tell the story of how high school needs to be a methodical, nose to the grindstone experience; the photo choices demonstrated limited creativity or meaning making. While the cognitive levels of high school students should be pushing toward the higher levels of cognition, indeed, the pace of the work tends to stifle those higher levels of relating images to their experiences. The photos were really at the application level of Bloom's taxonomy, one of the lower levels of cognition (Memo, February 28, 2018).

Student Diary Analysis

Historians, biographers, and literary scholars have used diary documentation for ages to interpret important historical events. Sociologists recently have used personal documentation to establish pictures of social realities from individual perspectives (Corti, 1993). I used the diaries of Niran, Hana, and Akhari, which they kept for the week of March 19-25, 2018, as a research tool to collect detailed information about how they managed their time and the personal sacrifices they had to make to organize their time.

During the week of March 19, 2018, I shared three individual Google Documents with Niran, Hana, and Akhari to keep track of the time they were engaged in activities, what they were doing during these times, and the sacrifices they had to make to finish these activities.

I checked in on each student twice during this week, once on Tuesday, March 20 and again on Friday, March 23. In addition to checking on the student diary progression, I also set up a daily Boomerang email reminder to be sent to the students at 7:00 PM to remind students to fill in their daily diaries before they went to bed. I had to contact both Hana and Akhari by email regarding their entries once each to understand specifically what they had

written. Once I had received the daily diaries from Niran, Hana, and Akhari, on March 26, 2018, I then coded their entries to see where they were spending most of their time and what they had sacrificed to accomplish these activities. I decided to not only tally the number of responses, but also to keep track of the number of minutes each individual was involved with each activity.

These diary entries were important because high school aged students typically are vague in expressing how they use their time. These diary entries asked the students to keep track of how they managed their time, and more importantly, to reflect on what they had to sacrifice to accomplish the tasks they chose to do. These entries allowed me to understand what a typical week is like for ninth graders at the ISB and for me to empathize with the stressors in their life. This activity also helped me better understand the demands placed on students outside of the ISB and how much free time and sleep time these students have in a typical week. These diary exercises would be an excellent way of advisors to get to know their students better at the ISB, and for teachers to understand the demands placed on students in a typical week (Memo, March 18, 2018). A summary of the codes and the minutes from each student can be seen in Tables 7-14.

Summarizing the weekly diary analysis of Niran, Hana, and Akhari (Table 7), three consensus themes emerged: ISB school work, ISB activities, and academic work outside of school. Niran devoted a total of 1,120 minutes (18.5 hours) of his time after school working on ISB work, 780 minutes (13 hours) to the ISB after-school activities, and 680 minutes (11.3 hours) to academic responsibilities outside of the ISB. Hana spent 650 minutes (10.8 hours) of her time on ISB school work, 520 minutes (8.7 hours) participating in the ISB after-school activities, and 335 minutes (5.6 hours) on academic responsibilities outside of school. Akhari devoted 798 minutes (13.3 hours) to her ISB course work studies, 260 minutes (9 hours) to after school activities, and 115 minutes (1.9 hours) to academic responsibilities outside of the

Table 7

Comparison of Time Spent on ISB School Work, ISB Activities, and Academic Work Outside of the ISB After School Hours for Niran, Hana, and Akhari for the Week of March 20, 2018

Student's Name	ISB School Work (minutes)	ISB After School Activities (minutes)	Academic Work Outside of the ISB (minutes)
Niran	1,120	780	680
Hana	650	520	335
Akhari	798	260	115

Table 8

Summary of the Codes, Descriptions, Minutes, and Activities from the Diary of Niran

Code	Description of Answers by Student	Tallies	Number of Minutes Monday through Friday Spent on this Activity after School	Percentage of Non-School Hours Spent on this Activity Monday through Friday	Number of Minutes Saturday through Sunday Spent on this Activity	Percentage of Hours Spent on this Activity Saturday through Sunday
WD— OAR	Outside Academic Responsibilities	8	185	6.7	495	31.6
WD— ISB	ISB School Work	15	960	34.8	150	9.6
WD— OACT	Organized Activities Outside of ISB	4	30	1.1	250	16.0
WD— ISBA	ISB Activities	8	780	28.3	0	0.0
WD— PT	Personal Time	28	805	29.2	670	42.8

Table 9

Summary of the Codes, Descriptions, Minutes, and Activities from the Diary of Niran

Code	Description of Answers by Student	Tallies	Number of Minutes Monday through Friday Spent on this Activity after School	Percentage of Non-School Hours Spent on this Activity Monday through Friday	Number of Minutes Saturday through Sunday Spent on this Activity	Percentage of Hours Spent on this Activity Saturday through Sunday
WD— OAR	Outside Academic Responsibilities	8	185	6.7	495	31.6
WD— ISB	ISB School Work	15	960	34.8	150	9.6
WD— OACT	Organized Activities Outside of the ISB	4	30	1.1	250	16.0
WD— ISBA	ISB Activities	8	780	28.3	0	0.0
WD— PT	Personal Time	28	805	29.2	670	42.8

Table 10

Summary of the Codes and Descriptions from the Niran's Diary Representing Sacrificed

Activities

Code	Description of Answers by Students	Tallies
WD—HW	Weekly Diary Homework Time	21
WD- FAM	Weekly Diary Family Time	14
WD—NOM	Weekly Diary Nothing Missed	13
WD—SLP	Weekly Diary Sleep Time	11
WD—ACT	Weekly Diary Activity Time	1

Table 11

Summary of the Codes, Descriptions, Minutes, and Activities from the Diary of Hana

Code	Description of Answers by Student	Tallies	Number of Minutes Monday through Friday Spent on this Activity after School	Percentage of Non-School Hours Spent on this Activity Monday through Friday	Number of Minutes Saturday through Sunday Spent on this Activity	Percentage of Hours Spent on this Activity Saturday through Sunday
WD— OAR	Outside Academic Responsibilities	1	0	0.0	335	17.1
WD— ISB	ISB School Work	3	530	27.4	120	6.1
WD— OACT	Organized Activities Outside of the ISB	3	0	0.0	335	17.1
WD— ISBA	ISB Activities	4	520	26.9	0	0.0
WD— PT	Personal Time	17	885	45.7	1170	59.7

Table 12

Summary of the Codes and Descriptions from the Hana's Diary Representing Sacrificed

Activities

Code	Description of Answers by Students	Tallies
WD—NOM	Weekly Diary Nothing Missed	13
WD—PT	Weekly Diary Personal Time	8
WD—HW	Weekly Diary Homework Time	3

Table 13

Summary of the Codes, Descriptions, Minutes, and Activities from the Diary of Akhari

Code	Description of Answers by Student	Tallies	Number of Minutes Monday through Friday Spent on this Activity after School	Percentage of Non-School Hours Spent on this Activity Monday through Friday	Number of Minutes Saturday through Sunday Spent on this Activity	Percentage of Hours Spent on this Activity Saturday through Sunday
WD— OAR	Outside Academic Responsibilities	2	90	4.0	25	1.6
WD— ISB	ISB School Work	13	365	16.3	433	28.5
WD— OACT	Organized Activities Outside of ISB	3	90	4.0	25	1.6
WD— ISBA	ISB Activities	4	260	11.6	0	0.0
WD— ISBT	ISB Transport Time	8	460	20.6	0	0.0
WD— PT	Personal Time	15	950	42.5	1037	68.2

Table 14

*Summary of the Codes and Descriptions from the Akhari's Diary Representing Sacrificed**Activities*

Code	Description of Answers by Students	Tallies
WD—NOM	Weekly Diary Nothing Missed	13
WD—HW	Weekly Diary Homework Time	10
WD—SLP	Weekly Diary Sleep Time	4
WD—OACT	Weekly Diary Outside ISB Activity Time	3
WD—PT	Weekly Diary Personal Time	2

ISB. The data helped to support the Photovoice claims that ISB school work, after-school activities and finding a balance between the two are the most stressful aspects of the transition from middle school to high school.

Niran's diary responses. Table 8 shows that Niran spent most of his time after school during the week on ISB school work, 34.8% of his time, a number sadly greater than the amount of personal time he had for himself during this school week (29.2%). In addition to spending a lot of time on his school work, Niran also spent a great deal of time on ISB activities; 28.3% of his afterschool time was devoted to after school activities during the time of the diary. What I found surprising about Niran's diary was the amount of time he was spending on academic work outside of his ISB classes. During the school week he spent approximately 7% (6.7%) of his time on academic pursuits outside of the ISB, and on the weekends this ballooned to 31.6% of weekend time (Memo, April 4, 2018).

Unlike his peers, Niran has done a decent job of balancing his time between school work, after school activities, and his personal time since he spent approximately one-third of his time on each during the week of this diary. On the weekends, Table 9 shows that Niran spent more time on activities and academic pursuits outside of school but managed to find more personal time. Over the course of the week, Niran spent the most amount of time outside of personal time on ISB school work, followed by participation in ISB activities and academic pursuits outside of school. His diary confirms the main stressors that were found in the Photovoice analysis of school work and finding a balance between academic success and after-school activities (Memo, April 1, 2018).

With each planned activity, there is something that has to be sacrificed to accomplish this activity. Table 10 shows that Niran missed out on completing homework the most during the week of this diary (n=21 tallies), followed by time with his family (n=14 tallies), sleep time (n=11 tallies), and time for his activities (n=1 tally). There were numerous (n=13)

occasions in which Niran thought he was not missing out on anything by the decisions he made during this week. It is depressing to see that Niran is so busy that he had sacrificed time with his family to accomplish his academic work. I did not expect to see a high school student recognize that family time was lost because of his schedule. I expected to see time with friends or personal activities being sacrificed instead (Memo, April 1, 2018).

Hana's diary responses. Outside of her personal time, she spent the most amount of time after school on her ISB course work (27.4%) and ISB after-school activities (26.9%). Similar to Niran, she saw an increase in time demands from academic pursuits outside of school (17.1%) on the weekend and with activities not associated with the school (17.1%) as can be seen in Table 11.

When analyzing the activities that Hana perceived she was missing out on, she felt that she missed out on personal time (n=8 tallies) and time for homework (n=3 tallies) the most as can be seen in Table 12. Most of her responses stated that she was missing out on nothing (n=13 tallies) from the decisions she made during the time of this diary. Hana's diary responses were more typical of what I expected from a high school student (Memo, April 1, 2018).

Akhari's diary responses. Unlike Niran and Hana, she does not live close to the ISB. Consequently, the one thing that stuck out most to me about analyzing her diary was how much time she spent traveling to and from school (Memo, April 1, 2018). During the diary week, she spent 20.6% of her awake time outside of school hours traveling to and from the ISB, which was more than any other activity she participated in outside of her own personal time. Akhari also spent a great deal of time on her ISB studies (16.3%) and ISB activities (11.6%) during this week. Due to the amount of time she spent traveling to and from the ISB, she had to spend more of her weekend time on ISB work than Niran and Hana. Akhari spent 28.5% of her awake time the weekend on ISB work as can be seen in Table 13.

In analyzing what she had to sacrifice during this week it is no surprise due to her travel time to and from school that ISB school work (n=10 tallies) and sleep (n=4 tallies) were the two most frequent responses as can be seen in Table 14. Her other tallies were missing time for activities outside of the ISB (n=3 tallies) and personal time (n=2 tallies). Similar to Hana, Akhari thought that most of the time she was not missing out on anything due to her choices (n=13 tallies).

I knew that students spent a great deal of time commuting from downtown, but I did not anticipate it taking this much time. Not only is this a great deal of time lost during the week, but Akhari is an EAL student who spends more time on school assignments due to her weak English abilities. It was eye-opening to see how much time she had to use on the weekend to catch up on her ISB work (Memo, April 1, 2018).

The Balancing Act: Time for Self, Grading and Workload Pressures, and Internal Pressures

Table 6 provides a summary of the consensus themes that emerged in PAR Cycle 2 in which CPR (n=10 students) agreed that they were constantly in a balancing act. They were in a state of finding a balance between school and their personal lives, living up to expectations about getting good grades, navigating the stress of increased school work load, and understanding the internal pressure that develops largely from external sources to succeed. The themes that emerged the analysis of the ten photos provided by the student participants in PAR Cycle 2 offered a way to talk about this in another way and externalize their concerns. The conceptual and empirical evidence supports these findings.

In Chapter 2, I explored the biological, psychological and social changes that students encounter as they are entering high school and that help them to make the transition from middle school to high school. This is one of the most difficult transitions that students experience in their education, and it occurs at a time when they are making other significant

developmental transitions (Erikson, 1968). In particular, at this stage (ages 13–19), adolescents are settling on understanding and then gaining fidelity to their identity, including the existential questions of who they are and who they are becoming. Gender roles are at the forefront of this exploration but identifying roles in terms of future occupations are a strong source of anxiety. This is the bridge time between childhood and adulthood, and the pressure to succeed in school is a critical part of ensuring that future as an adult. I explored the research literature as it speaks to these findings. There is clearly a difference in the literature in how to approach the balance between school demands and personal life and development; particularly discussion of this balance issue in the Asian context is important. In connecting the literature to the findings in PAR Cycle 2, I focus on students finding a balance between school work and their personal lives, the pressure that students experience to get good grades, the pressure students experience of keeping up with their school work, and the internal pressure that students apply to themselves to be successful.

Balance: School and Personal

Schneiderman, Ironson, and Siegle (2005) stated that everyone is exposed to stressful situations at the societal, community, and interpersonal level. A school is a place where adolescents spend most of their time in classrooms, are exposed to norms of their culture, have time with their friends, and engage in extracurricular activities all of which shape their identity and prepare them for their futures. Eccles and Roeser (2011) noted that during this time of life, the only activity on which adolescents spend more time is sleeping. Knowing all of this, it makes sense that an adolescent would have difficulty finding a balance between school work and their time. In the following paragraphs, I explore important themes to finding a balance between school and personal life for students. These themes include each student having playtime, downtime, and family time each day and how cultural differences

between European-American and Confucius Heritage Cultures and their approach to students trying to find a balance between school work and their personal lives are contrasting.

In an interview with *Education News*, Denise Pope said that “every kid needs PDF (playtime, downtime, family time) every day, no matter what the age” (Rubin, 2011). She argued that parents should think about their value system and come up with their definition of success and an action plan of how they will apply their vision to their parenting practices. In essence, parenting styles ultimately create the best foundation for children to be successful (Rubin, 2011). This, however, means something different in different cultures. Chua (2014) wrote in the *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, that the best way for a parent to prepare kids for a successful future is never to accept mediocre grades, to stress academic performance, and to instill a deep respect for authority. Abeles et al. (2011) stated that they were concerned that performance pressure on children was destroying happiness and self-esteem, and stifling creativity. These differing views are seen in the European-American culture in which learning is centered on the world around an individual, but in Confucius Heritage Cultures (CHC) learning is centered on a person’s goal to be his or her best and to become a better person socially and morally. In the tradition of Confucius, the four major themes to learning are “perfect self, take the world upon oneself, learning virtues, and action is better than words” (Li, 2012 pp. 20-21). Unfortunately, students have trouble finding a balance between these four major themes, and that leads to increased stress in balancing the new expectations and their own sense of a personal life.

Confucius, according to Tan and Yates (2010), saw the process of learning as extensively studying, carefully inquiring, thinking thoroughly, and practicing earnestly. Extensive studying can lead to a life that does not healthfully balance school work and an adolescent’s personal life. In PAR Cycle 2, the students came to a consensus about their Photovoice themes, which indicated that the three most significant stressors were academic

stress, academic grades, and school work. Finding a balance between academics and activities was a struggle for most of the students in our PAR. Analysis of the diaries that Niran, Hana, and Akhari kept in March 2018 indicated that these students struggled with finding a balance between school and their personal life during the school week. Niran spent 29.2% (see Table 9) of his time outside of school on personal time, while Hanna (45.7%) (see Table 11) and Akhari (42.5%) (see Table 13) spent less than half their waking hours outside of school on their personal lives.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the East Asian concept of *chaio shun* and how it emphasizes balanced family relationships (Dewar, 2018). Otto (2016) stated that parents who follow this east Asian philosophy believe that their children can improve in almost every situation through hard work and effort. This philosophy that children can improve in nearly every case through hard work and effort can be quite stressful when it comes to school and finding a healthy balance in life. Working harder and applying more effort often takes more time, which can take students away from things they enjoy. Working harder to improve was evident in the diaries of Niran, Hana, and Akhari—all of whom are from East Asian cultures. Blazer (2012) stated that students are pushed both physically and emotionally in additional classes, often finishing their studies well beyond midnight which leaves little to no time for exploring a personal interest. Niran spent 31.6% of his weekend time awake on academic pursuits outside of the ISB and 9.6% of his time on school work from the ISB. Hana allotted 17.1% (see Table 9) of her weekend time to academics outside of ISB, and 6.1% to the ISB school work (see Table 11). Akhari only spent 1.6% of her time on school work outside of school but designated 28.5% of her weekend time to the ISB school work (see Table 13).

Stress is inevitable in a highly competitive school like the ISB. There is pressure from home, from teachers, and keeping up with the increased school work load in high school is a daunting challenge for many students transitioning from middle school. What I have found

most interesting in PAR Cycle 2 is that there is another pressure I had not seen as a teacher that has emerged, and that is internal pressure to succeed (Memo, May 14, 2018).

Internal Pressure

During the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade, students have not only transitioned into high school, but their stress has also transitioned from external stressors to being internalized stress. In this section I detail how the students are feeling internal pressure to succeed in school and elaborate on the emerging theme of Academic Peer Emulation (APE). I revisit the diary entries in more detail and elaborate on how stress has evolved for the students as their freshman year has progressed.

Evolution of stress in PAR Cycle 2. Earlier in Chapter 6, I provided a summary of the data that were collected from the Photovoice activity once a consensus had been made by the student Co- Practitioner Researchers (CPR); that evidence can be found in Table 12. I found another theme emerged with my follow up questions that was only mentioned once during our Photovoice consensus discussions and that was internal pressure. In Chapter 5, I wrote about how students were feeling pressure from their peers to be successful, so I thought I would follow up on that question in addition to the other questions listed in Table 12 in PAR Cycle 2.

In Table 15, the tallies from the three interviews for follow up questions after a consensus was determined from the Photovoice data collection indicated that finding a balance between school work and activities (n=14 tallies), internal pressure to succeed (n=12 tallies), concern about academic grades (n=8 tallies), and school work (n=7 tallies) were the four largest responses. In addition to these responses, students found socializing with peers (n=6 tallies), social media communication (n=2 tallies), more personal responsibility (n=2 tallies), activities (n=1 tally), and external pressure to succeed (n=1 tally) as additional stressors at this moment in the transition.

Table 15

Summary of the Codes and Descriptions from the Three Group Meetings After a Theme Consensus was Determined

Code	Description of Answers by Students	Tallies
SAS—BAL	Student Academic Stress Balance	14
SAS—IP	Student Academic Stress Internal Pressure	12
SAS—AG	Student Academic Stress Academic Grades	8
SAS—SW	Student Academic Stress School Work	7
SAS—SS	Student Academic Stress Student Socializing	6
SAS—SM	Student Academic Stress Social Media	2
SAS—PR	Student Academic Stress Personal Responsibility	2
SAS—ACT	Student Academic Stress Activities	1
SAS—EP	Student Academic Stress External Pressure	1

Internal pressure to succeed. Feld and Shusterman (2015) found that “self-perception is grounded in the group to whom a student is comparing himself or herself” (p. 40). Ella agreed with this finding when she said that “most of the pressure is from myself. I think going to a school, like this school, where a lot of people get really good grades, it is unintended pressure to get good grades” (PAR Cycle 2, Group A, February 26, 2018). Sunan said, “there is sort of like a lot of pressure that people put on themselves in terms of grades. I guess they are constantly trying to improve it and it puts a lot of pressure on them.” He continued that “it’s the fear that you won’t do well in the future if you fail” that causes him to put pressure on himself to succeed (PAR Cycle 2, Group B, February 27, 2018).

Lily said the following regarding my peer pressure question, “I think it is more like pressure from myself. I don’t care about being the best in my class; I just don’t want to fail anything” (PAR Cycle 2, Group A, February 26, 2018). Ji Su also said, “I also get pressure from myself” (PAR Cycle 2, Group A, February 26, 2018). Kiet said, “I kind of put that pressure on myself, I kind of try to aim a bit higher than I can” (PAR Cycle 2, Group C, February 28, 2018). Paul also admitted that he “definitely feels a lot of pressure” and that it was an “internal struggle” to keep his grades high to compete with his friends by not being an “outlier” (PAR Cycle 2, Group B, February 27, 2018).

Cultural pressure. Emily felt this internal pressure was cultural for her, saying:

I have family that are Asian, and they said they expect a lot out of kids, and they want everyone to be an overachiever, I guess. When I talk to my friends in America, their family there they feel a whole lot less pressure to do superior in school. They do not feel the need to be totally above average and to get into Ivy league schools like Harvard or Yale. It really stems from what we are expected by the culture.” (PAR Cycle 2, Group B, February 27, 2018)

Zhang et al. (2016) observed that causes to perceived stress in students from CHC backgrounds comes from two sources: from within since they have been raised to value hard work and have a desire for upward social mobility, and from parents/teachers from whom students receive support to prevent them from feelings of shame and exclusion. For example,

Korean young adults are aware of the financial pressure their studies place on their parents, and their failure is also a reflection on their parents based upon the filial piety culture. This causes complications in family relationships and adds additional pressure to the students to perform (VanderGast et al., 2015).

Western cultural influence on stress. Adolescents also find that stress comes from additional sources such as college admissions, the Western media frenzy over status, money, and success, which is a systemic cultural issue, and a failure of how success is defined (Rubin, 2011). Dr. Pope's investigative team asked students in their survey how they determined success, and most of the typical results were "money, grades, test scores" (Rubin, 2011). These external factors seem to be driving the internal pressure that students are placing on themselves in high achieving schools like the ISB.

School culture. The most telling statement for me came from Niran who said,

It also has to do with our school. Our school is much more supportive than other schools; we do not shame people for doing bad things, this shame usually comes from inside because no one says anything to you; it sort of has the opposite effect, I don't really get it. It is sort of like; people are disciplining themselves in order to get better grades, at a certain point it is helpful, but at a certain point it is bad." (PAR Cycle 2, Group B, February 27, 2018)

This internal pressure seems prominent in this group after speaking with them, and as a physics teacher in the school, I see students placing an undue burden on themselves to succeed. I have named this internal pressure, Academic Peer Emulation (APE), where students are trying to achieve a standard of excellence that is causing unwanted stress in search of grades instead of learning. I believe this competitive structure is directly related to the competitive environment that is endemic to the ISB. It originates with parents, school leaders, and teachers, and is then transmitted to the students.

Diary analysis. Earlier in Chapter 6 I analyzed the weekly diaries of Niran, Hana, and Akhari; three consensus themes emerged: ISB school work, ISB activities, and academic

work outside of school. As I wrote earlier, Niran devoted a total of 1,110 minutes of his time after school working on ISB school work, 780 minutes to ISB after-school activities, and 680 minutes to academic responsibilities outside of the ISB (see Table 14), while Hana spent 650 minutes of her time on ISB school work, 520 minutes participating in the ISB after-school activities, and 335 minutes on academic responsibilities outside of school (see Table 14) and Akhari devoted 798 minutes to her ISB course work studies, 260 minutes to after school activities, and 115 minutes to academic responsibilities outside of the ISB (see Table 14).

Akhari wrote in her diary on March 19, 2018: “sleep + studying for Japanese math (I should do math prob, but I have many assessments this week, so I can’t do it today” (PAR Cycle 2, Akhari Diary). This internal struggle about what to do with her time indicated to me that she was struggling with internal pressure. Later in the week she wrote about another internal struggle of missing out on working on her homework while she relaxed after school. She said, “I took too much free time” (PAR Cycle 2, Akhari Diary, March 21, 2018). The most telling statement she provided in her diary was about attending a Spirit Night sports event on Friday, March 23, 2018 after school. She enjoyed the evening but lamented, “I have many homework, Japanese–Kanji test on Tuesday + practice for debate, EAP vocabulary test on Tuesday, Biology articles to read and news, Japanese math I should work on it” (PAR Cycle 2, Akhari Diary) followed by several frowny face emojis. She felt guilty about enjoying her evening when she could have been studying. She said, “my study time was wasted, but it’s okay because I can cover in the weekend” (PAR Cycle 2, Akhari Diary, March 23, 2018).

Evolution of stress. Stress in transitioning from middle school to high school evolved over the course of PAR Cycle 2. The students in the CPR group found it difficult to strike a balance between their school work, after school activities, and their personal lives. They felt an influence from their own cultures and the culture of the school to perform at a high level.

There was additional pressure applied to these students to get good grades, so they could gain acceptance into a prestigious university. This pressure was magnified by an increase in the amount of school work that students have and the number of summative assessments they had to take. There was the added stress of preparing for the IB Diploma classes, and for the first time, a realization about the competition for university acceptance. All of these pressures made these students realize as a group that they were experiencing their own internal pressure to be successful on top of these external pressures.

In the next section, I first investigate what is it about the culture and structure of ISB from an organizational standpoint that causes APE to be so prevalent in the school. Second, I examine institutional theory that claims an institutional environment can significantly influence the development of formal structures in an organization (Myer & Rowan, 1977).

Analysis of the ISB through Organizational Theory Lens

Organizational theory can be used to explain much of what happens in higher education and private international schools (Harris, 2017). In this section of Chapter 6, I specify a finding from our data that I explored in more detail and provide a rationale as to why this finding can be explained using theoretical perspectives from organizational theory. In the next part of Chapter 6, I explain how the theories behind certain organizational theories and stake holders at the ISB help to explain why students are experiencing APE from an institutional standpoint: institutional theory, coercive isomorphism, mimic isomorphism, and normative isomorphism, open systems, the political elites, ISB teachers.

Institutional Theory

A frame that helps explain how international schools operate is institutional theory. International schools like other organizations attempt to conform readily to recognizable and acceptable standards within their organizational field—namely, the larger milieu of international school, and in the case of the ISB, select international schools offering an IB

program. This conformity helps to create legitimacy for the organization. Institutional theory describes how both purposeful and inadvertent choices lead institutions to mirror norms, values, and ideologies of their organizational field. In turn, this tendency enhances our understanding of how the organizational actors experience the pressures for organizational members and the structures to become more similar, which ultimately decreases institutional diversity (Harris, 2017).

International schools exist within an institutional environment in which external stakeholders, like government agencies, board members, parents, accreditation agencies, and international education programs, influence in part the expectations for organizational behavior and practices. Hatch (1997) described stakeholders as “actors interacting to form an organization’s immediate environment [or as] any actor vital to an organization’s survival or success” (p. 59). When international schools conduct business within these guidelines and accepted approach, these external stakeholders view the school as being a legitimate educational entity. The environment then rewards the school with funding regarding tuition payments and grants, interested students, and excellent faculty, but also provides positive and negative support that shapes the behavior of the school. As a consequence, institutional theory argues that the environment determines organizational options and limits the availability of choices from which school leaders can select options. External pressure for conformity also limits the number of decisions available for school leaders (Harris, 2017).

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) characterized these pressures and expectations on organizations as a whole by using Max Weber’s phrase the “iron cage,” a sense of rigidity that in turn drives international schools toward isomorphism, or the enforcement of strategies and action that resemble other international schools. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) explained the mechanism of isomorphism by suggesting three types of isomorphic processes: coercive,

mimetic, and normative, with each type leading to more homogenization within a particular organizational field.

Coercive isomorphism. Coercive isomorphism is when the other organizations, on which an international school depends, apply pressure such as a government instituting new regulations or an accreditation agency changing its standards (Harris, 2017). Meyer and Rowan (1977) wrote that

many of the positions, policies, programs, and procedures of modern organizations are enforced by public opinion, by the views of important constituents, by knowledge legitimized through the educational system, by social prestige, by the laws, and by the definitions of negligence and prudence used by the courts.” (p. 343)

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) stated that “both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society within each organization function” (p. 150).

Li (2012) pointed out that “nowhere is competition for education as intense as in East Asia” (p. 65). In this case, there is internal coercion exerted by the array of expectations from parents and board members of the ISB by expecting their children to work hard, have good grades, and to attend a prestigious university. The school also has this expectation, so it can better compete for students in a highly competitive Bangkok market, which now number in excess of seventy international schools (“International Schools Database,” 2018). By prominently displaying International Baccalaureate (IB) test scores on the ISB website along with prestigious universities that graduates of the ISB have attended, the school participates in maintaining an internal pressure that resembles coercion in the sense of maintaining standards. As of March 2018, over 150 universities have visited the ISB from 15 different countries, and on average 250 universities visit each year (Davies, 2018), so there is a constant reminder for students to strive to be their best so they can attend an elite school. In 2018, the Director and Secondary Head visited 12 premier universities in the United

Kingdom and the US, which included Imperial College London, King's College London, London School of Economics, School of Oriental and African Studies, University College London, Boston College, Emerson College, MIT, Northeastern University, Simmons College, Tufts University, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and Yale (Davies, 2018) and their visit was published in a PTA magazine called *Touchstone*, to which one colleague quipped, "they aren't visiting the University of Iowa, I can guarantee you that" (A. Andrade, personal communication, March 30, 2018). The purpose of these visits was to enhance communication between the ISB and these schools so more students can gain acceptance into these schools, thus enhancing the reputation of a school that considers itself one of the premiere international schools in the world. This improved communication may lead to more influence by these schools on the ISB and thus creating a more stressful environment for our students so they can work to qualify for acceptance into an elite school.

The ISB is one of the five founding member schools and one of 128 schools in the International Schools Association of Thailand (ISAT). ISAT works with the Thai Ministry of Education, the Board of Investments (BOI), the Department of International Trade Promotion, and the Office of the Private Education Commission and has become the driving force for higher educational standards in Thailand ("About ISAT | ISAT," 2014). These schools compete not just for resources and customers, but for political legitimacy and social and economic legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The education offered by these schools is recognized by accreditation organizations from around the world, including the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), the Council of International Schools (CIS) and CfBT Education Trust ("About ISAT | ISAT," 2014). Meyer and Rowan (1977) noted that "ceremonial criteria of worth and ceremonially derived production functions are useful to organizations: they legitimate organizations with internal participants, stockholders, the

public, and the state” (p. 351). According to the organization, “ISAT works closely with its member schools to ensure high standards of education through encouragement of best practices, ethical behavior” (“About ISAT | ISAT,” 2014). There is pressure on the ISB leadership from numerous government and accreditation agencies to provide high-quality education, along with sports, fine arts, and co-curricular offerings.

In addition to political pressure from outside sources, the ISB is also facing economic pressure in a competitive market with decreasing enrolment. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 4, there has been a right-sizing of staff due to a recent economic downturn, which has led to low morale and larger class sizes. There is an organizational push that is the power, reputation of the school, and the economic needs (through downsizing) that are pressing in on teachers and students in ways that are subverting other valuable outcomes, helping to increase this internal pressure APE experienced by students and even their teachers. This has created a colonial structure buoyed up by the reputation and economic benefits to the adults in charge (Memo, April 23, 2018). Sadly, these “political decision makers often do not experience directly the consequences of their action” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 150), and it is the teachers and students who experience the stress and pressure the most.

Mimetic isomorphism. Regarding schools, “organizations tend to model themselves after similar organizations in their field they perceive to be legitimate or successful” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 152). Schools model themselves after more prestigious schools, which “makes the credit position of an organization more favorable” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 351).

The ISB has modeled their structure and innovation on successful international schools around the world, by becoming more inclusive and by building and operating a wilderness campus north of Bangkok despite the recent economic downturn. In addition to successful schools, the ISB leadership have visited Google, Twitter, Tesla, and other cutting-

edge corporations in the past to get ideas on improving. The ISB has been trying to model itself after organizations that the leaders of the school deem more legitimate or successful (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). These visits have placed stress on the leadership teams to implement change to justify the costs, which has added stress to the teachers and students of the school.

Normative isomorphism. External expectations and educational norms influence international schools and as DiMaggio and Powell (1983) stated, “normative pressures stem from professionalization” (p. 152). Examples include: the teaching staff should have a master’s degree and a teaching certification or that introductory science courses should be a semester long. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) stated that normative isomorphism is encouraged through the filtering of staff, with this filtering occurring through the hiring of individuals from similar organizations in their industry. International teachers are usually hired through recruitment agencies like Search Associates, where teachers register and have letters of reference submitted by referees. This allows schools to search through data bases to find teachers that fit their style and philosophy and who come from similar schools which continues the cycle of new, excellent, driven teachers at the ISB and competitive environments in the classroom.

By connecting the findings from PAR Cycle 2 to organizational and institutional theory, I can more deeply understand that demonstrating student issues in transition may not be enough to change the structures. There is something institutional going on at the ISB that makes it a difficult place to transition from middle school to high school. The school continuously reinforces a reproduction model of what it thinks it should be and reflects what the external pressures demand of it, being the paying customers—the parents who expect their money to provide a top-notch education as well as entrée into prestigious universities. New practices may come from our study of the middle school to high school transition at the

ISB, but it has every possibility of morphing back to the norms of the institution. The inertia is so strong at the school to have anything new resemble the norm, which makes it incredibly hard to be different. The ISB as an institution is controlled by and takes on the personality of the leaders, which makes the mechanism of control authoritative—causing a culture of fear. Despite my study not focusing on this aspect of the school, the students are feeling something created by this culture that is institutionalized (Memo, April 30, 2018).

Open Systems

A second frame that helps us understand how international schools operate is open systems theory. Walter Buckley (1998) wrote about open systems saying, “that a system is open means, not simply that it engages in interchanges with the environment, but that this interchange is an essential factor underlying the system’s viability” (p. 44). Scott and Davis (2007) stated that, “open systems are capable of self-maintenance on the basis of throughput of resources from the environment” (p. 95). According to Scott and Davis (2007), “interaction with the environment is essential for open system functioning” (p. 95).

Theorists of general systems distinguish between an open and closed system by applying the concept of entropy—energy that cannot be turned into useful work. The second law of thermodynamics states that all systems spontaneously move toward a state of increasing entropy, or maximum disorder. Open systems are capable of importing energy from their environment and experience negative entropy. Open systems are able to maintain themselves at a high level and can mature towards an increase in complexity and order (Scott & Davis, 2007). This means that open systems “restore their energy, repair breakdowns in their organization, and may improve structures and routines” (Scott & Davis, 2007, p. 96).

The ISB is an open system that survives as a social organization that caters to the needs of a broad clientele base to survive. The school manages to preserve and maintain its

structure; a process known as “morphostasis” (Buckley, 1998, p. 177) but can still change or adapt; a process known as “morphogenesis” (Buckley, 1998, p. 53). This ability to adapt to the school’s external environment has allowed the ISB to become more elaborate in its structure. The ISB today bears little resemblance to the school that was founded in 1951.

The school now has an enrolment of close to 2,000 students, as opposed to 50 when it was first founded. The students attending the ISB come from 60 different nationalities (Davies, n.d.). The ISB has an annual tuition of 909,000 Baht (“Fees—International School Bangkok,” 2017) which is nearly \$30,000 annually. This requires a substantial family income, or financial support by the company in which the parent(s) of children attending the ISB are employed. The high cost of education and the socioeconomic status of the parents can place a lot of pressure on the school to meet the needs of students, or the demands of the parents. Scott and Davis (2007) argue that “from an open system point of view, there is a close connection between the condition of the environment and the characteristics of the systems within it” (p. 97).

Political elites. Pondy and Mitroff observed that “a system will exhibit no more variety than the variety to which it has been exposed in its environment (as cited in Scott & Davis, 2007, p. 97). The typical ISB family is incredibly wealthy compared to local standards; as an example, the average Thai makes 14,000 Baht (\$450) per month (“Thailand Average Monthly Wages | 1999-2018 | Data | Chart | Calendar,” 2018); that annual salary is about 18% of the cost of the school tuition. Thus, while the ISB family salaries vary, they can afford the tuition plus additional costs of transport for their children. These economic elites, who are also a part of the ISB Board of Trustees and politically placed parents, bring their self-interests and values to the school, adding pressure to those involved in making decisions at the school.

Teachers. Scott and Davis (2007) stated that “systems are composed of multiple subsystems, and systems are themselves contained within larger systems” (p. 97). It makes

sense that the political and economic elites would have a driven perspective and have significant influence on how the ISB is run. What about the typical teacher at the ISB? Is there a certain personality trait that a typical ISB teacher displays, or has working at the ISB changed teachers due to external pressures at the school (Memo, March 2, 2018)? To find out, I asked two colleagues and a former ISB employee to describe a typical ISB teacher. All three had the same opinion despite me asking them individually at different times in March of 2018. The ISB teachers are “driven” and are your “typical Type-A personality” (E. Gantry, personal communication, March 29, 2018). A second colleague said, “Type-A personality and driven” (A. Andrade, personal communication, March 30, 2018), and then continued, “They are high-quality teachers and have a certain arrogance associated with them because they know they are good” (A. Andrade, personal communication, March 30, 2018). When I asked an ex-colleague about the ISB and what he thought of the teachers, he said, “ISB is an ideal Type-B environment with an amazing campus and full of Type-A personalities” (R. Dalton, personal communication, March 31, 2018). According to Saul McLeod (2017):

Type-A individuals tend to be very competitive and self-critical. They strive toward goals without feeling a sense of joy in their efforts or accomplishments. Interrelated with this is the presence of a significant life imbalance. This is characterized by a high work involvement. Type-A personalities experience a constant sense of urgency: Type-A people seem to be in a constant struggle against the clock. (p. 1)

After reading this definition of a Type-A behavior pattern, it became apparent to me that this internal pressure APE that students are feeling is probably being influenced by the overabundance of Type-A teachers at the ISB; I posit that their typical competitive and self-critical personality traits are having an impact on the students as they transition through high school. I cannot say this with certainty, since I have only spoken to three colleagues and this is something that warrants further investigation. However, the pressure to succeed at the ISB

permeates through the school and teachers as a whole. Does the high work involvement of teachers at the ISB come from their innate personalities, or have the teachers adopted this mentality that is externally driven? In all likelihood, the pressure systems exist in something like concentric circles—nested and mutually reinforcing (Memo, March 15, 2018).

In PAR Cycle 1, teacher/student relationships were one of the major themes that emerged from the analysis; the findings indicated that the CPR experienced high school teachers as stricter than middle school teachers. They stated that high school teachers had higher standards than their middle school counterparts and that teachers apply pressure on the students to be successful. This also is apparent in PAR Cycle 2 in which academic grades (8 tallies) and school work (7 tallies) were two of the four most significant responses from students about the key stressors (see Table 14); these perhaps are heavily influenced by their teachers. The grades and the demanding school work directly feed into creating internal pressure on the students as they experience the need to be successful. The largest response was finding a balance between school (14 tallies), activities and their personal life, another trait of Type-A personalities, which can also lead to the feeling of having internal pressure placed on one's self.

In PAR Cycle 3, I investigated how the students have adapted to their current stressors after completing their ninth-grade year. In this first year of high school, they have had to adjust to longer classes, more homework, more assessments, more academic rigor, more activities and sports, new friendships, new classrooms, finding a balance, and ISB high school institutional norms. The ways that having a summer off and having entered their tenth-grade year where they need to make a new adjustment by preparing for entry into the IB Diploma Program after tenth grade forms the basis of this Cycle's questions.

In the next part of Chapter 6, I write about my transformation as a leader by looking back at how my leadership has changed and in what ways my practices as a leader changed as

a result of this study. After reflecting on how I have changed as a leader, I then go through the plans of PAR Cycle 3.

Implication for Leadership

In this part of Chapter 6, I elaborate on how I have transformed as a leader based on my experience with PAR Cycle 2 and how both my teaching and leadership approach is different as a result of this work. I then explain how my findings contribute to my plan for PAR Cycle 3.

Identity as a Leader

When I first entered education, I did not see myself as a leader, nor did I see myself as a leader as I gained experience as an educator. I saw myself pejoratively “only” as an educator, a coach, and a colleague. Through my experience with the Participatory Action Research project, I have realized, with the help of my professors at East Carolina University, that I am indeed a leader despite not holding a designated leadership role in a high school. I target these areas of leadership growth and development: contributing to changes in the science department, understanding broader possibilities for sharing findings, developing an appreciation for multiple perspectives, and using research to support ideas.

Leadership in the science department. What I have learned through the course of two action research cycles I have shared with my colleagues, and positive changes have happened in part as a result. I found that EAL students were struggling with taking chemistry as their initial science in ninth grade and as of next year, each student will have the option of taking either chemistry or biology as their first science course. In a small way, this is due to my research, but it is also due to easing scheduling restrictions in the department.

I was also a part of the ISB Science Curriculum committee for 2017-2018 that aligned our science standards from kindergarten to the IB Diploma. While on this committee I was able to speak for the students in our PAR group by saying they found the transition difficult

in English, science, and math due to the increase in workload and that they felt they were not fully prepared for the rigor of their high school classes. I mentioned my research in our first meeting and talked about how important it is to have teachers communicate between divisions. Using my background research and direct quotes from my PAR group, I was able to convince the Curriculum Coordinators at the ISB to allow teachers to meet during certain in-service days to discuss what is being taught and to better align curriculum between the middle school and high school. This is something that had supposedly been done in the past but was only visible on paper since many teachers had never met their counterparts in the middle school or high school. This experience was invaluable for the middle school and high school teachers to see areas of the curriculum that were not being covered and to better prepare students for their major laboratory writing assignments when they get to high school.

I spoke to the ISB science head of department on April 23, 2018 about the diary findings, and he was shocked to see how much time students were spending on the ISB school work, ISB after-school activities, and academic work outside of the ISB. He asked that I share my data so he can take these results and diaries to the next head of department meeting and discuss these findings with the ISB leadership team. He mentioned that the ISB heads of departments have been looking for data like this for some time but did not have any data to reference. The results of PAR Cycle 2 may have an impact on the amount of homework that students are receiving in the future and give teachers an idea of the struggles of EAL students and students that commute from downtown each day experience.

Science department student interviews. I found the interview process for both PAR Cycle 1 and PAR Cycle 2 to have been useful and have been amazed by how candid the students were during these two research cycles. One thing that I have implemented in my teaching is after I have given formative feedback on major writing assignments, I then confer with each student about the formative comments to make sure they have all of their questions

answered. With my experience audio-recording interviews, I have given students the choice of having their formative feedback interview recorded. I have mentioned how the large lab report grades have improved dramatically using these recordings and the rest of the ISB science department is now using this technology for major writing assignments. For the IB Diploma courses that I teach, I also do exit interviews with the students to better gauge how hard they will study for their final exams so I can better assess what their predicted grade will be. This strategy is also being implemented by several science teachers in the high school science department.

This PAR project has also demonstrated to me the importance of communication and initiative as a leader. Through the experiences of the students in this PAR, I have been able to encourage participation between the middle school and high school science teachers with the help of my head of department and the curriculum department at the ISB. A priority has been set to allow teachers between divisions time to meet during in-service training days to better align skills and knowledge that students acquire between grade levels in science and other courses.

PAR Cycle 3

In the PAR Cycle 3 with my CPR group, I continued to investigate how they were transitioning, only this time they had completed ninth grade and were starting tenth grade. This was the shortest of the three cycles, but in some ways, it is the most crucial cycle since the students were preparing for another transition: the transition from general high school classes to the IB Diploma once they enter the eleventh grade.

Summary

In PAR Cycle 2, I met with the student members of our CPR in three small groups where students had to analyze ten photos using Photovoice that the group produced. The students entered my classroom, and on the white board at the front of the classroom, ten

photos were displayed that were generated by the students in our PAR. The students then inspected the images, took notes, and as a group, they had to come up with a consensus of what stressful events the photos were displaying. Each group had to do this, and the results are presented in Table 13.

The first major theme to emerge was that students were having difficulty finding a balance between their school work and their personal lives. The next two significant themes to arise were that students were stressed about their grades and the amount of school work they have to deal with. The last major theme was an internal pressure which became more evident in the follow-up questions I asked them once the Photovoice qualitative data collection was over. This internal pressure that students experienced I have named APE. I also asked three students to keep a detailed diary of their activities for a week to see what students were participating in and what they had to sacrifice to complete these endeavors.

After collecting the data for PAR Cycle 2, I then researched the literature from Chapter 2 to see how it supported my findings. Once I completed this, I then looked at organizational theory to understand how the ISB affects the stress of this transition. In my argument, I believed that institutional theory was the most appropriate theory to explain the ISB since there are institutional issues that affect the stress that both students and teachers experience at the school. I then reflected on how PAR Cycle 2 has changed and impacted me as a leader.

In Chapter 7, I complete the presentation of PAR data by discussing the third and final cycle of action research. In addition to working with the remaining students in the CPR, sat down with Maggie Hughes, the eighth-grade counselor, and António de Andrade, the head of department for high school science, to see what themes of transfer they have taken from my CLE presentation that they attended.

CHAPTER 7: PAR CYCLE 3

Introduction

The aim of this action research was to engage my CPR group in an examination of the physiological, psychological, and socio-cultural factors related to the transition from middle school to high school to better understand the transition, so I can suggest changes to ease the transition in future classes at the ISB. In Chapter 6, I wrote about PAR Cycle 2. I asked 10 students in my CPR group to take a photograph of the most stressful aspect of the middle school to high school transition as of February 2018. I then met with these students in three groups throughout three consecutive days (February 26-28, 2018) to come up with a consensus on the main stressors displayed in the photos that were submitted. In March of 2018, I asked three students to keep a detailed weekly diary for me to explore the main stressors they were experiencing and how much time they were dedicating to events in their life.

At the start of PAR Cycle 3, there were only six students remaining out of the original 12. Five students transferred unexpectedly during the last school year, and one student chose to withdraw from the study. Nonetheless, I was able to further investigate how transnational students at this international school experienced the psychological and socio-cultural transitions from middle school to high school.

Overview of PAR Cycle 3

In this chapter, I introduce the process by which data were collected for PAR Cycle 3. In summary, PAR Cycle 3 included:

- Interviews with Niran (student) and Gary (a high school counselor). These interviews were used to create vignettes.

- Survey of the student participants (August/September 2018). Surveys were used to provide insights about how they were experiencing the transition from ninth grade to tenth grade and to reflect on their eighth to ninth grade transition.
- Community Learning Exchange (September 20, 2018). A CLE was conducted with a group of eight teachers and administrators regarding the transition from middle school to high school and collected data for PAR Cycle 3 from the participants in the form of individual Journey Lines on the tenth-grade transition and an online Google Form survey on transfer the participants would take from the CLE.
- Interviews with the eighth-grade counselor and the high school science head of department about transfer they were taking from the CLE presentation. In late September to mid-October 2018, I interviewed four people (Niran, a student from the CPR, the eighth-grade counselor, Maggie, the ninth-grade counselor, Gary, and the high school science head of department, António) on the transition from middle school to high school, which included the ninth to tenth-grade transition. The adults that were interviewed were asked to elaborate on transfer they would take from my findings from PAR Cycle 1 and PAR Cycle 2.

Tenth Grade Transition Vignettes

In this section, I present two vignettes that I wrote about the tenth-grade transition at the ISB. The first, is about Niran, a student who experienced the transition. The second is about Gary, a counselor at the ISB, who has guided students through many of these transitions. Both of these vignettes provide a biopsy of the student experience from my perception of their individual perspectives.

Niran's Vignette

Niran is an affable, considerate, studious, and brilliant young male Thai teenager who has contributed a great deal of meaningful information to my research over the past three years. Niran enjoys playing the piano, competing in badminton, singing, and performance arts. On September 19, 2018, I sat down with Niran, and he reflected on the stressors with his transition from middle school to high school and elaborated on what he feels will be stressful in tenth grade by drawing a timeline of stressful events and expanded on them.

Despite Niran being one of the top students in his tenth-grade class, when reflecting on ninth grade, he did find aspects of the transition from middle school stressful. For him, it was the number of clubs and activities that were on offer that he found stressful. He was eager to try as many things as he could but did not have the time to commit to all the activities he found interesting. He dabbled in the after VEX after-school robotics program, he played badminton, he sang in school plays, he performed in musicals and ultimately put most of his time into Model United Nations (MUN) towards the end of his ninth-grade year. Looking back, he wishes he would have applied himself more to more academic events and used some of his time for service-based projects. In tenth grade, he has pared back the number of activities he participates in and is concentrating on doing his best in the endeavors in which he is involved.

He feels more comfortable in tenth grade than he did in ninth grade and is aware of the increased expectations in his classes and after-school activities. After his experience in ninth grade, he has learned to manage his time better this year between his personal life, after-school activities, and his studies. In early September 2018, he was able to finish his piano exam, which has freed up a great deal of time for him on the weekends to spend with his family and friends. Unfortunately, this extra time was short-lived since Niran is mandated to participate in the Thailand Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) as a tenth grader. He thought ROTC would be physically rigorous but has found himself sitting around for hours on end every Saturday, so much so that his legs often hurt from inactivity. Niran has found the eight hours every Saturday to be a nuisance since he could be using this time to spend with his family and friends or to finish longer homework assignments.

Niran feels that the pressure to succeed in school has not changed much from ninth grade. He feels fortunate to have parents that prioritize effort over academic performance, although his parents place a priority on getting good grades. He admitted that this is rare among Asian parents of students at the ISB. Most of the pressure he feels to succeed comes from internal pressure and the pressure placed on him by his friends. Niran has a close group of friends that are high academic achievers, and they motivate each other to score as well as possible on assessments. He seems to enjoy this competitive environment he has with his friends as spoke passionately of how supportive his friend network is when someone does not reach their potential on an assessment. Despite the pressures at the ISB, Niran seems to be in a healthy place with the balance he has found between academics and activities.

As Niran explained his Journey Line of Stressful Events in Tenth Grade (see Figure 21), his responses were unusual in the fact that events were either stressful or not stressful. Niran has a very black and white, yes or no, approach to seeing the world. For him, signing up for a Global Citizenship Week (GCW) trip where he could be with his friends, and final exams were the most stressful events he foresaw in tenth grade. As we were about to end our conversation, he asked to see his Journey Line once again, and that is when he made his notation about how he is not always stressed out and is always happy (PAR Cycle 3, 9/19/2018). In those simple pen strokes, Niran captured who he ultimately is, a thoughtful teenager very aware of his life at the ISB and his place in it. I wonder what his peers in our CPR group will say about their transition into the tenth grade (Memo, September 19, 2018)?

Figure 21 shows Niran's Journey Line for what he perceived would be the biggest stressors in tenth grade as of September 19, 2018.

Both the vignette I wrote about Niran and Niran's Journey Line indicate his worries at the beginning of the tenth-grade transition. In the vignette, I noticed that he had improved at managing his time in tenth grade. At the start of his ninth-grade year, he overcommitted to numerous activities which caused him a great deal of stress. At the start of tenth grade, he was committed to concentrating on fewer activities and doing them well, which decreased the amount of stress he experienced. He was well-adjusted at the start of tenth grade and only experienced pressure to succeed from himself. This was evident in his Journey Line where he only stated two activities, auditions for a musical and IASIS Model United Nations, as stressful ventures. ROTC was a significant stressor both in his vignette and his Journey Line. In light of all the perceived stressors listed on his Journey Line, he stressed that he is happy and may have over exaggerated the magnitude of the stressors he experienced.

Gary is one of the three ninth grade counselors at the ISB. Gary is a gregarious counselor, who I mistook as not caring too much about his job before undergoing this research. In my earlier experiences with Gary, he was always supportive of students and looking out for their best interest, but he had a relaxed, jocular, almost carefree attitude about him that made him stick out from the typical Type A personality at the ISB. In my interactions with him through my research, I still found him to be caring for the students, but also serious in a sense that betrays his sometimes-disheveled appearance. His insight has been much appreciated on the transition from middle school to high school and in our last academic interview together on September 17, 2018; I decided to get his input on the tenth-grade transition at the ISB by asking him to complete a Journey Line (see Figure 22) and explain his notations and opinions (Memo, September 17, 2018).

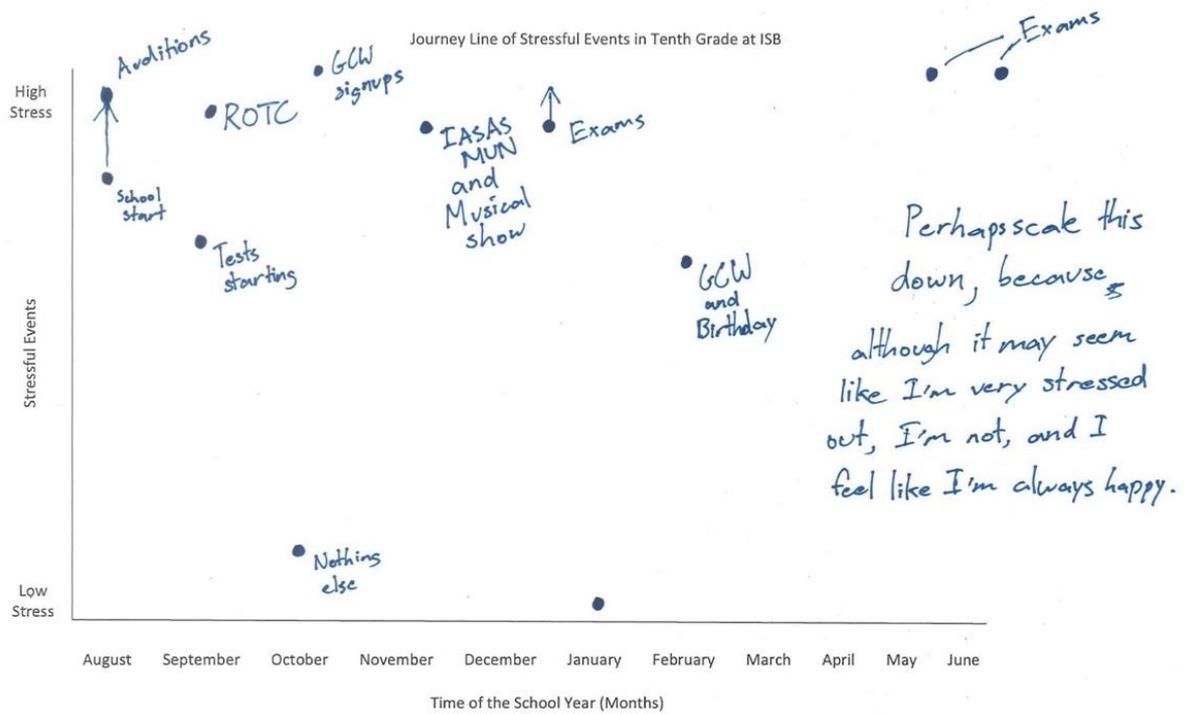


Figure 21. Niran's Journey Line for the tenth grade transition at the ISB.

When I sat down to speak with Gary, he reminisced over several years of experience as a counselor helping students with this transition and the positive energy he exuded about the start of the school year (Memo, September 17, 2018). Gary's vignette of the tenth-grade transition follow.

Gary's Vignette

Time management was a recurring theme in the interview I had with Gary about tenth grade transitions. He felt that students had improved in this area from ninth grade and as they entered tenth grade since it was a low stressor in his opinion. However, as soon as students see the yearly syllabi in their courses and start signing up for activities and sports, it quickly becomes evident to them that their free time is rapidly dwindling. As the school year progresses, Gary expressed that time management becomes more of an issue since there are more demands on student time from assessments, extracurricular activities, university research, standardized testing, and social outings. Even though the courses at the ISB are not labeled pre-IB courses, as they were in some of his previous schools, the academic rigor starts to increase as the year progresses, which requires more preparation time and time management stress becomes significant by the end of the year and final exams. These final exams have a substantial impact on final student grades, which impacts their GPA, class rank, and potentially which universities will accept these students.

At the beginning of tenth grade, Gary thought that academic expectations are amplified compared to ninth grade and are initially the most significant stressor for students early on. He thought that teachers in an IB school feel pressure to prepare students for the two-year program and that teachers need to lay the foundation of whether a student will be successful in their course in tenth grade before the student commits to taking this course in the IB Diploma. By the time students reach the end of September, they have been in class for five weeks and are starting to take their first summative assessments. The number of summative assessments increases as the first semester progresses, peaking with mid-term exams in classes like science around late November. Gary said that as students start to accumulate scores, they start comparing themselves to their friends and other classmates, which increases the pressure students feel about their performance. Students around November of tenth grade start thinking more about their identity when comparing themselves to others and wondering where they fit in socially and academically and what their future may hold. This particular stressor peaks in late March to early April when students have to start thinking about which IB courses they are going to take and what majors they are considering at university—still over two years away. Gary beamed that 80% of the students at the ISB are good to strong students but lamented there are 20% that are average to below average and that these students have to work incredibly hard to maintain their grades by the pressure they are feeling from their peers. These students in the bottom 20% have to work incredibly hard to be an average to below average student at the ISB.

Although not on his Journey Line (see Figure 22), Gary mentioned that all the academic, extracurricular, and parental demands placed on students restrict student expression of sexuality and that the ISB students tend to be at a younger level emotionally and sexually than their peers in a public-school setting. From his experience, children are sexually active in general at a later age at the ISB due to all the demands that are placed on

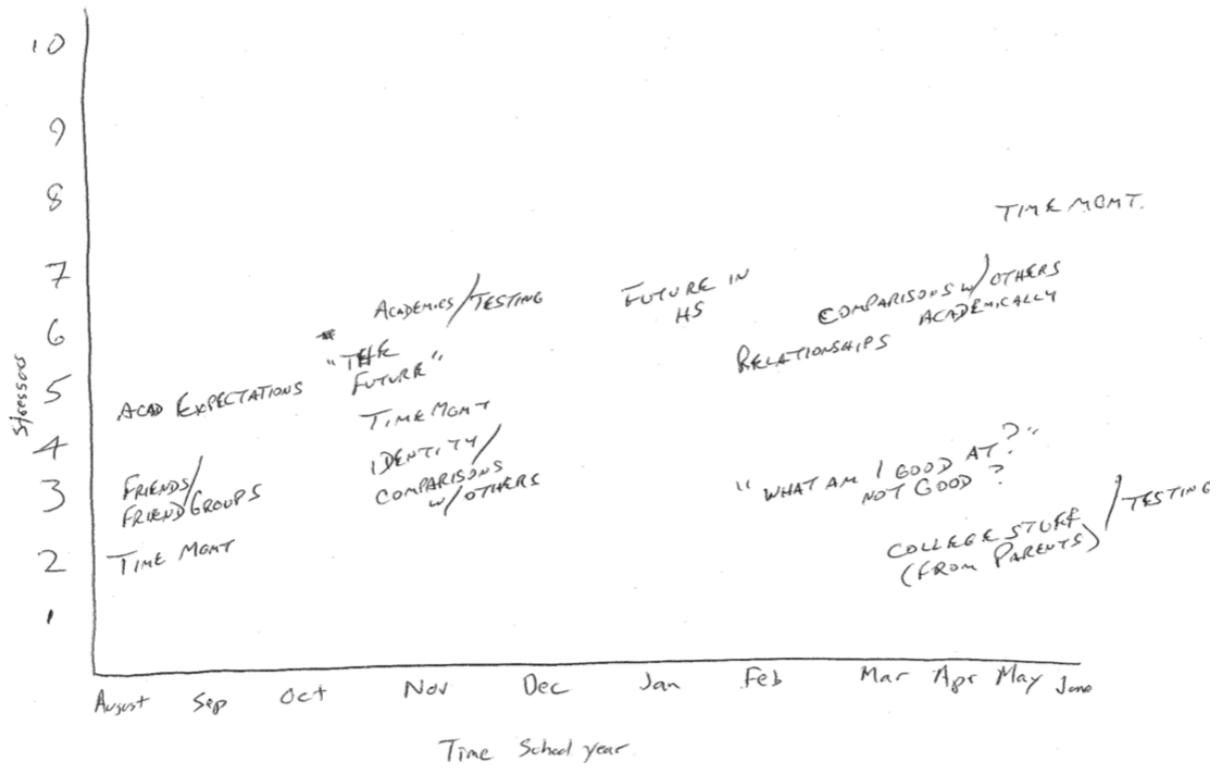


Figure 22. Gary's Journey Line for the tenth-grade transition at the ISB.

them by the culture and environment of the school. He feels this is not necessarily a bad thing, but it does add additional stress to the social and emotional development of students at the ISB.

From Gary's experience, there is a difference in how the American, Thai, Japanese, Korean students approach tenth grade. The parents of Thai students often employ tutors outside of the school environment to help their children with their studies, which Gary and the ISB do not encourage. The counselors at the ISB encourage students to seek out help from their teachers when they are uncertain and not to rely on tutors since there can be a miscommunication about content. Thai parents, in general, tend to feel the more, the better when it comes to exposure to new academic material. Gary thought this is not necessarily counterproductive, but that there were probably better ways these students could spend their time. Korean students often have tutors, but their tutors are for Korean math, or English for a standardized test they need to take in high school and not for their academic classes at the ISB. Japanese students are similar to Korean students in that they have tutors for Japanese math and other Japanese entrance exam practice. Japanese students also tend to spend time on Saturdays in schools to prepare them for Japanese entrance exams. The parents of American students tend to feel that their children get enough instruction at the ISB and that teachers are available to help when their child is uncertain and seldom employ academic tutors (PAR Cycle 3, September 17, 2018).

I got the feeling from Gary that he feels sorry for the students at the ISB and how busy the school can be. He commented several times about being an "old-timer" and seemed like he was reminiscing about his time in high school as we spoke. I too must admit that I kept thinking back to my time in high school and how different it was from the students that I taught at the ISB. Gary and I talked about whether this difference was a result of the Digital Age, but he thought it was the culture of the school and southeast Asia that has driven this intensely busy environment (Memo, September 17, 2018). He said, "I think a lot of the kids here are running from one class or activity to another to please somebody else who has an idea of what will make them successful in the future" (PAR Cycle 3, September 17, 2018). Gary continued, "it's kind of the nature of the beast actually, and I think many parents send their children to a school like this with the expectation that somehow all these things put together in a package are going to produce something that is a success by whatever measurement the parents are hoping for" (PAR Cycle 3, September 17, 2018). As we were about to end our conversation, I asked Gary whether the students have a healthy and balanced lifestyle at the ISB, and I was moved by his response. "It's sad to say this, but I think it's true. I don't think a student's happiness and wellbeing is the number one concern of people who are measuring what we do as a school, and that's parents, teachers, administration, counselors; everybody" (PAR Cycle 3, September 17, 2018). In my four plus years at the ISB, I could not agree more with Gary; the culture at the ISB is competition and academic performance (Memo, September 17, 2018).

Figure 22 gives a visual representation of what Gary thought were the biggest stressors in the tenth-grade transition at the ISB.

Gary's Journey Line and his vignette expressed the stressors that students encounter in tenth grade at the ISB. Gary indicated that time management stress increases as the school year progresses, culminating with final exams in May and June. He mentioned in his

interview that students have so many demands placed on them from their academics, extra-curricular activities, and parents that they are emotionally and sexually less mature than they should be at this age. This late maturation adds stress to the social-emotional development of students at the ISB. I wonder where he would have placed that on his Journey Line. His Journey Line also displays stressful events not mentioned in his vignette. Finding one's self was the origin of several of these stressors as a young adolescent. Initially, he thought that students were still figuring out the friend groups in tenth grade, a process that developed into finding their own identity. After establishing an identity, students started to think about their future in high school, which includes courses they would take in the IB Diploma. Relationships and understanding what their strengths and interests are developed later in tenth grade culminating with them considering their university choices.

I found it interesting that Gary never thought the students reached a maximum stress level and topped out around an eight on his drawing. This is much different than what Niran drew with his Journey Line where he had several stressors at the maximum level. I wonder whether Gary was looking at the stressors from the perspective of the students or was he influenced by his own life stress (Memo, September 19, 2018).

Transition Themes

In PAR Cycle 3, student surveys, ISB faculty Journey Lines and surveys, interviews of the eighth-grade and one of the high school counselors, a student interview, and an interview of the high school science head of the department were used to collect data. Once this data were collected, transcribed, and coded, several themes started to emerge. I present the themes as three domains, the CPR student perspective on the eighth-to-ninth-grade transition and the ninth-to-tenth grade transition, and the ISB faculty perspective on the ninth-to-tenth-grade transition.

Eighth Grade to Ninth Grade Transition

My first step in collecting data for PAR Cycle 3 was to send a survey to the remaining six students in my CPR group to understand how the students now looked at the transition from middle school to high school, after having a summer to reflect on their transition and to see whether the transition into tenth grade was different than the transition into ninth grade. My first question to the CPR group was, “Looking back at year nine, what were the three most stressful parts of the transition to high school and why? Please elaborate.” Table 16 illustrates the codes and tallies from the replies of my CPR group.

The results of PAR Cycle 2 (see Table 6) and the survey results for PAR Cycle 3 are similar. In both, balancing time was the most stressful aspect of the transition for the students. School work and academic grades were both significant stressors in PAR Cycle 2 and PAR Cycle 3. One thing that is interesting is final exams and thinking about university were severe stressors for the students in my CPR group once they reflected on the ninth-grade transition. At the time of PAR Cycle 2, the students had not encountered final exams yet, so it makes sense that this would be a significant stressor since final exams count for 20% of semester grades and grades now count towards university acceptance (Memo, October 21, 2018).

Time management. Sunan was surprised by how much more work there was in high school than middle school and how important it was to manage his time. He wrote that “there was a considerably higher amount of work transitioning to high school. I found myself sleeping much later and working harder through the day, but I learned to manage my time better” (PAR Cycle 3, September 23, 2018). He also mentioned that balancing his time with after-school activities was a challenge too, saying,

In high school the commitment to sports was much higher, I’m a swimmer where previously I swam only two to four days a week, in high school I was swimming at least four days a week, this meant I had to balance my work more evenly so that there wasn’t so much in one day.” (PAR Cycle 3, September 23, 2018)

Table 16

CPR Reflections on the Most Stressful Aspects of the Ninth Grade Transition

Code	Description of Answers by Students	Tallies
SASN—BAL	Student Academic Stress Ninth Grade Balance/Time Management	4
SASN—SW	Student Academic Stress Ninth Grade School Work	4
SASN—ACT	Student Academic Stress Ninth Grade Activities	3
SASN—EXM	Student Academic Stress Ninth Grade Final Exams	3
SASN—UNI	Student Academic Stress Ninth Grade University	3
SASN—AG	Student Academic Stress Ninth Grade Academic Grades	2
SASN—AP	Student Academic Stress Ninth Grade Academic Pressure	1
SASN—FUT	Student Academic Stress Ninth Grade Future	1
SASN—GCW	Student Academic Stress Ninth Grade Global Citizenship Week (GCW)	1
SASN—PP	Student Academic Stress Ninth Grade Peer Pressure	1
SASN—SCD	Student Academic Stress Ninth Grade Schedule	1

Ella lamented the amount of time she had to dedicate to studying compared to eighth grade. She said, “I had to learn to study and start studying a lot in ninth grade, so it was a little stressful getting used to spending my time that way and getting used to the whole process of studying” (PAR Cycle 3, September 25, 2018). She also struggled with managing her time in ninth grade. She said, “It was hard for me to fit in time to do things I wanted and have free time on top of all my activities and homework” (PAR Cycle 3, September 25, 2018).

Increased workload. Emily thought the most significant stressor looking back was the workload she had in ninth grade compared to eighth grade. She explained, “The most drastic difference and stressful aspect of transitioning was the workload. We are given about the same amount of work for almost every class, while in middle school we only get homework from few classes. It was more difficult to juggle all the work” (PAR Cycle 3, October 3, 2018).

Final exams. Paul was one of several students who mentioned the stress involved with final exams. His quote was the most emotional on this stressful event. He thought the final exams “just came out of nowhere. Middle school was just the normal formative and summative tests, but they never had the exams, so it was really stressful” (PAR Cycle 3, September 26, 2018).

The transition to tenth grade began for the students in my CPR in August of 2018. I was curious to see what the students in my CPR group thought were the big differences between the eighth to ninth grade transition and the ninth to tenth grade transition. I also asked the CPR students to write about what they were initially stressed about now that they were entering tenth grade and what they foresaw as being the most significant stressors they would encounter in tenth grade.

Tenth Grade Transition Themes

From my position as a high school physics teacher at the ISB, I was curious to see whether the transition from ninth grade to tenth grade was different for the students? I believed going into this data collection that they would find tenth grade more difficult since teachers are preparing them academically for the jump to the IB Diploma Programme in eleventh grade (Memo, October 15, 2018). I decided to ask them a few questions about the transition from ninth to tenth grade to see whether the transition was different for them.

The first question I asked them about the transition to tenth grade was, “Have you noticed any differences in tenth grade compared to ninth grade regarding stress? If yes, please elaborate.” Table 17 illustrates the results of the PAR Cycle 3 survey.

Harder classes. Ella succinctly described the significant differences between ninth and tenth grade in her response to my question. She said:

Yes. I have found that the classes seemed to have gotten a lot harder from ninth grade to tenth in comparison to eighth to ninth. We have been receiving more homework, and the content of the classes seems to have gotten a lot harder than in ninth grade. There is also some more stress in tenth than ninth grade because we have to start thinking about and researching colleges. (PAR Cycle 3, September 25, 2018)

Paul was emphatic with his response, saying:

DEFINITELY! Back in ninth grade, they ease you into the homework and tests and make sure that you’re used to what life as a ninth grader will be like, in tenth grade, however, they throw you into tenth grade and slam you with homework and tests and tenth grade life is basically ninth grade multiplied by two. (PAR Cycle 3, September 26, 2018)

From Ella’s perspective, she thought:

I think the courses are a lot more difficult—I have never experienced quite this large of a change in difficulty between grade level classes before, but the teachers are still good. I think the classes are harder, but the teachers have stayed the same as in they are still good at teaching in my opinion. (PAR Cycle 3, September 25, 2018)

Paul thought that his courses were “more difficult” (PAR Cycle 3, September 26, 2018) and that his teachers were not making their classes as interesting as his ninth-grade teachers.

Emily noted that, “workload is definitely greater this year” (PAR Cycle 3, October 3, 2018)

Table 17

CPR Group Summary of Stressors in Tenth Grade that are Different from Ninth Grade at the ISB

Code	Description of Answers by Students	Tallies
SAST—AG	Student Academic Stress Tenth Grade Academic Grades/GPA	3
SAST—BAL	Student Academic Stress Tenth Grade Balance/Time Management	2
SAST—IDIF	Student Academic Stress Tenth Grade Increased Difficulty in Courses	2
SAST—ROTC	Student Academic Stress Tenth Grade ROTC	2
SAST—SW	Student Academic Stress Tenth Grade School Work	2
SAST—UNI	Student Academic Stress Tenth Grade University	2
SAST—IHW	Student Academic Stress Tenth Grade Homework Increased	1
SAST—SCD	Student Academic Stress Tenth Grade School Schedule	1

and that she has the essentially the same teachers as last year. Kiet wrote that “tenth-grade courses seem to be more fast paced compared to ninth grade” (PAR Cycle 3, October 9, 2018). The vignette I wrote about Gary indicates my perception of his feelings about increased academic expectations, namely that they were initially the most significant stressor when students enter tenth grade. He thought this was due to teachers trying to prepare students for the IB Diploma classes their students would take in eleventh grade. He mentioned that as students accumulate scores, they compare themselves to their classmates and experience additional pressure to be successful (PAR Cycle 3, September 27, 2018).

University pressure. Table 19 shows that university planning was the most significant anticipated stressor in tenth grade ($n = 9$). Emily found the most significant difference between ninth and tenth grade to be the increased pressure of thinking about which university she would attend. She wrote that

there is much more stress in tenth grade. It is about the time when we look at universities that we want to go to and even participate in campus tours. This makes the pressure to go to a good university even higher. (PAR Cycle 3, October 3, 2018)

Ella wrote:

My case for this is a little different. My parents want me to start researching college now as I am interested in a music-related degree and finding a good, affordable college that can help me make a career of that is hard. I have already started using whatever time I can to research colleges, and it is only going to get more serious as time goes on this year, so the amount of stress related to college research will increase as well.” (PAR Cycle 3, September 25, 2018)

Gary agreed with Ella and stated in his vignette that “students have to start thinking about which IB courses they are going to take and what majors they are considering at university—still over two years away” (PAR Cycle 3, September 17, 2018).

The third question I asked the CPR group was, “What are you currently most stressed out about school? This can be anything school related.” Early in tenth grade, I would have expected most of the answers to be related to school work, grades and balancing their time

Table 18

What Students in the CPR Group were Most Stressed about at the Beginning of Tenth Grade

Code	Stressor	Tallies
SAST—BAL	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Balance/Time Management	4
SAST—AG	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Academic Grades/GPA	3
SAST—ACT	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Activities	1
SAST—IHW	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Homework Increased	1
SAST—IDIF	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Increased Difficulty in Courses	1
SAST—ROTC	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade ROTC	1
SAST—SCD	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Schedule	1
SAST—SW	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade School Work	1
SAST—THAI	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Thai Class and Coursework	1

and it turns out this is the case (Memo, October 15, 2018). Table 18 illustrates the responses from the survey the CPR group completed.

Time management and academic stress. Ella wrote that time management and keeping good grades were her main concerns. She said, I am mostly stressed about maintaining my GPA from last year. I think I had a good GPA last year and want to keep than for this year, but with harder work and more homework, it has been really stressful staying on top of my work and keeping high grades. (PAR Cycle 3, September 25, 2018)

Sunan was most stressed about “getting good scores. I think that it is important to start paying attention to the scores I get in school because it will really start to determine the opportunities I have for college” (PAR Cycle 3, September 23, 2018). Emily was also most concerned about her grades and university acceptance. Emily wrote, “in high school grades matter a great deal when applying for college. Thus, the pressure to be a high achieving student increased drastically” from middle school (PAR Cycle 3, October 3, 2018).

Both Emily and Niran were in the school play, and both found it difficult to manage their time and grades—especially Niran since he was in ROTC for eight hours every Saturday (Niran’s vignette). Emily wrote:

I am most stressed out about my time management for homework and finishing projects because of my participation in the musical “Anything Goes.” The rehearsals stretch out for a long period of time, making it more difficult to finish all my work and study for tests in a timely manner. (PAR Cycle 3, October 3, 2018).

Gary thought that time management was a major theme of the tenth-grade transition, which I referenced in in the vignette. He thought that time management became more of an issue as the school year progressed due to more demands on the students’ time from extracurricular activities, assessments, standardized testing, university research, and social outings. In our interview, he stated that the academic rigor increases as the year progresses to prepare students for their IB Diploma classes. This stress culminates in the end of the year exams, which have a significant impact on student GPA, class rank, and which universities may accept the students (PAR Cycle 3, September 17, 2018).

ROTC. There was one response from this group that I had not anticipated, and that was how ROTC was stressful. I was unaware until doing this research that all Thai males have to participate in ROTC every Saturday once they have reached tenth grade. This makes the transition more difficult and less equitable for Thai males (Memo, October 15, 2018). Sunan wrote that this was stressful “trying to get school work and school activities done while have ROTC all day Saturday” (PAR Cycle 3, September 23, 2018). Niran found ROTC to be more of an annoyance than being stressful. For him, it was taking eight hours every Saturday away from his studies and personal life (PAR Cycle 3, September 16, 2018).

The fourth question I asked the CPR group was “What three things do you think will be the most stressful about the tenth grade and why? Please elaborate.” I had anticipated that the top stressors for this question would be similar to the data that was presented in Tables 18 and 19. I was surprised that the number one stressor for students in tenth grade was thinking ahead to university planning and acceptance, especially since this is something I did not think about as a student until late in my junior year of high school (Memo, October 15, 2018).

Table 19 presents the coded answers provided by my CPR group.

As a high school physics teacher at the ISB, I was curious whether the students were finding their classes more difficult in tenth grade than ninth grade, since I agree with Gary in that teachers are trying to prepare their students for the IB Diploma (Memo, October 15, 2018). There were only two answers that were more than one tally in this part of the survey, and they were increased difficulty in school work ($n = 4$) and an increase in the amount of school work ($n = 2$).

Pressure to succeed. The last question I asked was “Do you feel pressure to be successful in school? If you do, who is applying this pressure on you to succeed? The answer can be more than one person.” Questions eight and nine had unanimous answers of “yes”

Table 19

The CPR Groups Anticipated Most Stressful Aspect of Tenth Grade

Code	Stressor	Tallies
SAST—UNI	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade University Planning	9
SAST—BAL	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Balance/Time Management	7
SAST—AG	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Academic Grades/GPA	5
SAST—ACT	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Activities	4
SAST—SW	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade School Work	3
SAST—IDIF	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Increased Difficulty in Courses	2
SAST—FUTC	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Future and Thinking of a Career	2
SAST—EXM	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Final Exams	1
SAST—IB	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade IB	1
SAST—LFT	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Less Free Time	1
SAST—LSLP	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Less Sleep	1

Table 20

CPR Group Response to who is Applying Pressure to Succeed

Code	Stressor	Tallies
SAST—IP	Student Academic Stress Tenth Grade Internal Pressure	8
SAST—PP	Student Academic Stress Tenth Grade Parental Pressure	4
SAST—FP	Student Academic Stress Tenth Grade Friend Pressure	2
SAST—UNI	Student Academic Stress Tenth Grade University Acceptance	2
SAST—AG	Student Academic Stress Tenth Grade Maintaining Academic Grades/GPA	1

from all the participants, as I expected from my time working at the ISB. Table 20 presents the coded responses from the CPR group survey.

In Chapter 6, I wrote about the concept of Peer Academic Emulation (APE) and how students at the ISB tend to put pressure on themselves to be competitive with their peers, academically. In tenth grade, this internal pressure still exists but parental pressure tallies doubled from ninth grade ($n = 8$ vs. $n = 4$).

Sunan wrote, “the person applying the most pressure is myself because I want to do well in school, other than myself my parents also want me to be successful in school so that I can find a nice job and all that” (PAR Cycle 3, September 23, 2018). Ella wrote about internal pressure and parental pressure by stating:

Of course, I feel pressure to be successful in school. I think a lot of this pressure actually comes from myself because I know I need to get really good grades to get into some of the colleges I want to get into, and if I get bad grades or am unsuccessful in school, I will feel really disappointed in myself. A lot of the pressure comes from my parents as well. It has always been expected for me to get good grades, but now that college and possible scholarships are in the picture, there is more pressure to do well to get those things. (PAR Cycle 3, September 25, 2018)

Paul experienced the need to impress both his father and his friends. He wrote:

I feel like there is a lot of pressure being applied to my grades this year. With my friends being crazy intelligent and me not being so intelligent, I find that I need to get the same or better grades than my friends. I also find that my dad is a pressure not to reckon with when it comes to grades. Not like he’s gonna do anything if I get a bad grade, it’s just I wanna impress. (PAR Cycle 3, September 26, 2018)

Emily was driven by her competitive nature to do well in school. She wrote:

I feel a lot of pressure to be successful. No one is necessarily applying pressure to me, as I gain most of that from my competitive nature. People at the ISB are very successful in school, and I feel the need to live up to that or be even better. (PAR Cycle 3, October 3, 2018)

Kiet internalized her pressure to be successful by writing, “most of the pressure is from myself” (PAR Cycle 3, October 9, 2018). Niran said that the pressure he experiences is

“normally it’s from me and my friends because my friend group is quite competitive in terms of grades” (PAR Cycle 3, September 16, 2018).

Transition Within a Transition—Preparation for the IB Diploma

The amount of school work and homework increases as a student enters high school. This increase in work can cause students to experience added pressure, especially now that their grades count towards university acceptance. When asked what the most difficult part of the transition to high school was, Sunan said: “Work. There was a considerably higher amount of work transitioning to high school. I found myself sleeping much later and working harder through the day” (PAR Cycle 3, September 23, 2018). In this section I explore how high school is academically more challenging and typically, less supportive than middle school; I also address the stress of preparing for the IB Diploma Programme. The ISB is an academically high achieving school and stress is inevitable, but how that stress is applied to students turns out to be mainly internalized.

Academically, comparing high school to middle school, coursework tends to get more difficult as the quantity of schoolwork and the demands for quality both increases. Emily said in our last interview that “The most drastic difference and stressful aspect of transitioning was the workload. We are given about the same amount of work for almost every class, while in middle school we only get homework from a few classes. It was more difficult to juggle all the work” (PAR Cycle 3, October 3, 2018). Ella pointed out that classes in tenth grade are “a lot more difficult. I have never experienced quite this large of a change in difficulty between grade level classes before” (PAR Cycle 3, September 25, 2018). Alspaugh (1998) wrote that many students suffer a loss in academic achievement when transitioning from eighth to ninth grade because they cannot keep up with the demands. Sunan mentioned that “there was a much higher focus on grades in high school, which was apparent in the grading system (1-7 instead of E, M, Ds). There was a higher emphasis on getting good scores in class” (PAR

Cycle 3, September 23, 2018). In addition, Eccles and Roeser (2011) suggest that learning environments that students experience in high school are less supportive and that only the highest achieving adolescents are motivated as they progress through school. Paul found his classes in tenth grade to be more difficult, and he was receiving less support from his teachers. He said: “In tenth grade, the teachers aren’t providing you with a format to follow as in ninth grade there is a very clear format to follow” (PAR Cycle 3, September 26, 2018). Jones (1993) found this increased workload leads to more self-doubt generated by an individual and the fear of failure increases.

An IB curriculum presents an added stressor. As Suldo and Shaunessy-Dedrick, (2013) indicated:

Students who transition from middle school to an accelerated high school curriculum, such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma program, may face additional academic challenges than peers pursuing a typical high school curriculum, particularly with respect to performance expectations in multiple advanced classes, preparation for end of- course exams, and service to the community, all of which are components of IB. (p. 196)

These researchers found in IB and general education programs that IB high school students experienced significantly more stress than their peers in general education. This stress was evident in ninth grade despite the IB Diploma program starting in eleventh grade. Their research reported that students entering an IB high school perceive more stress than students going into a general education high school. Increased competition for acceptance to university along with pressure to produce high scores on standardized tests for university admission has caused high school to be more stressful for adolescents. Sunan said that choosing his IB classes was a significant stressor for him. “I think this will be stressful as it gets closer since you cannot change your courses and you have to make sure that you align it with the possible majors and masters you will take in college, meaning that I need to start thinking about what I will do as a job in the future which is causing stress even now” (PAR Cycle 3, September 23, 2018).

In the Pope interview about her research group's Our Challenge Success survey of 26 schools and 10,275 students found that 67% of the sample said they were often or always stressed about school (Rubin, 2011). The research team asked a qualitative question about "what, if anything, causes you stress" and the top ten answers from the majority of students was school related; with the top answers were homework, tests, grades, and competition to get into college. The research found that adolescents agree that stress comes from all areas including parents, internal pressure, and from the school itself. Feld and Shusterman (2015) found in their research that self-reported stress was significantly correlated with goal valuation, academic self-perceptions, and motivation/self-regulation, which seems to be consistent with what the students in my CPR were experiencing. Sunan mentioned that "the person applying the most pressure is myself, because I want to do well in school" (PAR Cycle 3, September 23, 2018). Ella also mentioned that "a lot of this pressure actually comes from myself because I know I need to get really good grades to get into some colleges I want to get into, and if I get bad grades or am unsuccessful in school, I will feel really disappointed in myself" (PAR Cycle 3, September 25, 2018). Paul said: "There is a lot of pressure being applied to my grades this year. With my friends being crazy intelligent, and me not being so intelligent, I find that I need to get the same or better grades than my friends (PAR Cycle 3, September 26, 2018). Emily was also applying pressure to herself to be successful: "I feel a lot of pressure to be successful. No one is necessarily applying pressure to me, as I gain most of that from my competitive nature. People at the ISB are very successful in school, and I feel the need to live up to that or be even better" (PAR Cycle 3, October 3, 2018). Kiet succinctly said in our final interview, "I feel like most of the pressure is from myself" (PAR Cycle 3, October 9, 2018).

The ISB Faculty Perspective on Tenth-Grade Transition

On September 20, 2018, I led a Community Learning Exchange (CLE) during a professional development day at the ISB. During the session that I conducted, there were eight ISB faculty members present, which included the middle school principal, eighth-grade counselor, middle school activities coordinator, one middle school teacher, and four high school teachers. During our two hours together, I had the participants go through similar data collection exercises as my CPR did during PAR Cycle 1 and PAR Cycle 2. We started by having each faculty member draw what they thought was the most stressful aspect of the middle school to high school transition on a small portable white board and then place their drawing for display at the front of the room as can be seen in Figure 23.

Once all of the drawings had been collected and displayed, the CLE members then came to the front of the room to look at the pictures and then as a group; they had to come up with consensus themes from the drawings. The themes that were generated were amplified expectations, future consequences, social uncertainty, academic grades, finding a balance, time management, and parent stressors. Interestingly, none of the CLE members saw high school teachers as being one of the main stressors in the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade (Memo, September 20, 2018). These themes were determined by audio recording the discussion that the CLE group had regarding the drawings they had created and the consensus that was determined by the group. This audio recording was later transcribed and coded (see Table 21) to find themes from the consensus discussion. Once these themes had been discussed as a group, the CLE members then went to the back of the classroom where they could see the drawing my CPR group did in PAR Cycle 1 which led to further discussions.

As each faculty member went back to their seats, I proceeded with my presentation and introduced the concept of APE and showed several quotes from my CPR group related to PAR Cycle 2 and their stressors from Photovoice data collection. At the end of the CLE, I



Figure 23. CLE drawings of the most stressful aspects of the middle school to high school transition at the ISB.

Table 21

Consensus Coded Responses from the Drawings of the CLE Participants

Code	Description	Tally
FPSN—AE	Faculty Perceived Stress Ninth Grade Amplified Expectations	14
FPSN—FC	Faculty Perceived Stress Ninth Grade Future Consequences	12
FPSN—SU	Faculty Perceived Stress Ninth Grade Social Uncertainty	11
FPSN—AG	Faculty Perceived Stress Ninth Grade Academic Grades	10
FPSN—FB	Faculty Perceived Stress Ninth Grade Finding a Balance	9
FPSN—TM	Faculty Perceived Stress Ninth Grade Time Management	8
FPSN—PS	Faculty Perceived Stress Ninth Grade Parent Stressors	5

asked each participant to fill in a five-question survey and to fill out a Journey Line template that they were provided with the most stressful events of the ninth to tenth-grade transition. The questions in the CLE survey can be seen in Appendix C, and the Journey Lines can be seen in the Appendix H.

The survey explanations provided by the CLE members of their Journey Line was then coded, and these results can be seen in Table 22. When comparing the main stressors in tenth grade as seen by the ISB faculty (see Table 22) in my CLE to the anticipated most stressful aspects of tenth grade in Table 19 from my CPR group, there are significant differences. The five most anticipated stressors from my CPR group were university planning (n = 9), time management (n = 7), academic grades (n = 5), after-school activities (n = 4), and school work (n = 3). The CLE group thought that final exams (n = 10), summative assessments (n = 6), GCW signups (n = 4), sports and activity tryouts (n = 4), and grade checks (n = 3) would be the five most stressful aspects of the tenth-grade transition. There is no overlap at all in the top five of both groups. For the CLE participants, there was only one mention each of final grades and time management.

As an educator, I believe that many teachers think the transition from middle school to high school ends once the students have acclimated to ninth grade. I believe that high school is a continuous transition and that the transition from ninth grade to tenth grade is different than the eighth grade to ninth grade transition. I had my own opinions, but I was curious to see why my ISB colleagues and CPR group thought were the most significant differences between the two-grade level transitions. Table 23 presents the results from the CLE participants.

Looking at the results of Table 23 which shows the differences that ISB faculty perceive different about the eighth to ninth grade transition and Table 17 which shows what the CPR group feels are the biggest differences have one significant similarity. The ISB

Table 22

Coded Responses of the Journey Line Explanations of the CLE Participants

Code	Description	Tally
SAST—FE	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Final Exams	10
SAST—SA	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Summative Assessments	6
SAST—GS	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade GCW Signups	4
SAST—ST	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Sports and Activity Tryouts	4
SAST—GC	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Grade Checks	3
SAST—GB	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade End of Year Goodbyes	2
SAST—IB	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade IB Signups	2
SAST—ET	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade End of Season Tournament or Performance	1
SAST—FG	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Final Grades	1
SAST—NF	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Making New Friends	1
SAST—NB	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade No Calendar Breaks in Second Semester	1
SAST—TM	Student Academic Stressors Tenth Grade Time Management	1

Table 23

CLE Participants Coded Responses to the Main Differences between the Eighth to Ninth Grade and the Ninth to Tenth Grade Transition

Code	Description	Tally
SASD—FM	Student Academic Stress Differences Familiarity Now that Students are in High School	10
SASD—AG	Student Academic Stress Differences Academic Grades are Harder to Achieve in Tenth Grade	7
SASD—SS	Student Academic Stress Differences Social Stress is More Prominent in Ninth Grade	7
SASD—NE	Student Academic Stress Differences Newness of Everything in Ninth Grade	4
SASD—UN	Student Academic Stress Differences Uncertainty of Entering High School	4
SASD—TR	Student Academic Stress Differences Teacher Relationships are More Developed in Tenth Grade	2
SASD—HE	Student Academic Stress Differences Higher Expectations in Tenth Grade	1
SASD—IP	Student Academic Stress Differences Internal Pressure Increases in Tenth Grade	1

faculty thought that being in high school and familiar with the surroundings was a big difference between the two transitions. Lynn, one of the high school teacher participants in my CLE presentation, wrote that students are “more settled with knowing where things are and how they work” and that students are “familiar with grading and workload expectations” (PAR Cycle 3, September 20, 2018). The CPR group’s question was based upon stressors, so it makes sense that familiarity was not an answer they would provide. As shown in Table 17, the CPR group’s top stressor was academic grades (n = 3) and this was the second biggest difference provided by the ISB faculty (n = 7). While the ISB faculty thought social stress (n = 7), adjusting (n = 4), and uncertainty (n = 4) were the biggest differences. Margaret, one of the high school teachers involved with my CLE wrote that, “social stresses are most obvious at the beginning” of ninth grade and that students are trying to figure out where they “fit in” (PAR Cycle 3, September 20, 2018). Margaret went on to state that “these stresses still exist” in tenth grade, however, “there is a much greater emphasis on their academic performance” than in ninth grade (PAR Cycle 3, October 9, 2018). The CPR group thought the main stress differences between the two transitions were time management (n = 2), increased difficulty in courses (n = 2), ROTC (n = 2), school work (n = 2), and stress related to university acceptance (n = 2).

Themes of Transfer at the ISB

In my three years of doing action research at the ISB, I have learned quite a bit from my CPR group, and I was able to share the results of PAR Cycle 1 and PAR Cycle 2 with eight colleagues during a CLE on September 20, 2018. I was eager to follow up with the participants of this group to see what changes they would make as a result of my presentation to ease the transition stress students experienced by students moving from eighth grade to ninth grade at the ISB. I chose to speak with one colleague from the middle school, Maggie, the eighth-grade counselor, and one colleague from the high school, the secondary head of

science, António. I have kept in close contact with both of these colleagues over the past three years, sharing the information I have learned, and both have been keen on making changes to ease the transition from middle school to high school at the ISB.

Middle School Transfer Themes

On October 9, 2018, I sat down with Maggie, the eighth-grade counselor, to interview her on what themes of transfer she was able to take from my CLE presentation on September 20, 2018. Our interview was informal and was a free-flowing conversation about changes she would like to implement in the middle school of the ISB to ease the transition to high school for students. I audio recorded our conversation and later coded her responses so I could qualitatively analyze the results of our discussion. Table 24 presents a summary of the themes and codes from our meeting.

The times I met with Maggie, she has always been passionate about her work. From her physical expressions to the tone of her voice, I could feel how impassioned she is about helping students. I could tell during our interview that she had reflected quite a bit on my CLE presentation and that she had a lot of useful improvements to share to ease the transition from middle school to high school (Memo, October 9, 2018).

Parental Education on High School Transition

Maggie thought the most significant change that was needed was to educate parents on their children living healthy and balanced lifestyles (n=11) and about the academic stress (n=9) that is associated with the move to high school. In her experience, the academic stress students experience entering high school is placed on students by their parents. She said that “until we can get parents around to a different vision of what high school could be and what comes after high school” (PAR Cycle 3, October 9, 2018) this academic stress and lack of a healthy and balanced lifestyle will persist in students at the ISB. Further, she said, “This is

Table 24

Summary of the Transfer Themes from the Eighth Grade Counselor Interview

Code	Description	Tally
TRN—EPHBL	Transfer—Educate Parents on Healthy Balanced Lifestyle	11
TRN—EPSAS	Transfer—Educate Parents and Students on Academic Stress	9
TRN—EHSTF	Transfer—Early High School Teacher Familiarity	8
TRN—EOSI	Transfer—Earlier Older Student Interactions	7
TRN—BUFT	Transfer—Better Use of Flex Time	6
TRN—MTMC	Transfer—Making the Transition More Comfortable	3
TRN—GNBUD	Transfer—Grade Nine Bump Up Day	2
TRN—EPSCC	Transfer—Educate Parents and Students on College Counseling	2
TRN—RFAX	Transfer—Reduce Fear and Anxiety	1

tricky to address, especially culturally in Asia” (M. Hughes, personal communication, October 9, 2018) and also argued,

If there are enough parents that aren’t engaging in the race to nowhere, then maybe we can have a critical mass of people that have a goal, that have their child have a healthy and balanced high school; where they get enough sleep, where they hang out with their friends, where they participate in sports and clubs and do a good job academically, but don’t kill themselves to get to where. (PAR Cycle 3, October 9, 2018)

She continued, “there will be some families we will never get to, but if we model this and stress how important this is, we might be able to persuade some” (PAR Cycle 3, October 9, 2018). Maggie wants to stress to parents that educators at the ISB “are all in the same place, but we got here in different ways, but I would wager that some enjoyed the journey more so than others” (PAR Cycle 3, October 9, 2018). She said, We can change pockets, like the pockets that are influenced by the Tiger Mom culture and influence the people in between. It’s tricky to raise a high school kid in this culture without them prescribing to those same beliefs. (PAR Cycle 3, October 9, 2018)

Maggie has reached out to the middle school administration to see whether she can organize parent meetings on the importance of their children living and healthy and balanced life in high school and how to alleviate the academic stress students experience during the transition. Maggie closely works with the ninth-grade counselors and the high school activities coordinator, and she would like to see the high school offer these same sessions to have a unified school position presented to the parents of children at the ISB.

Earlier Exposure to High School Teachers and Students

Another area of the transfer that Maggie has started to implement is earlier exposure to ninth grade teachers and high school students for students in eighth grade. Table 24 shows that early high school teacher familiarity (n=8) and earlier older student interactions (n=7) were the third and fourth largest coded responses for transfer from my meeting with Maggie. She continued that “some of the key stressors for the kids are different teachers they don’t know” and being exposed to “older kids” once they reach high school (PAR Cycle 3, October 9, 2018). The high school activities coordinator and Maggie started working together recently

to integrate high school students into middle school student seminars which have given these eighth-grade students “exposure to high school kids in friendly, supportive sessions” (PAR Cycle 3, October 9, 2018). Maggie commented that the ninth-grade counselor Harry has recently been using the high school peer tutoring program to work with the middle school learning lab after school. Eighth-grade “kids are seeing these kids as a resource and not being big and scary and mean” which she thinks will help ease the transition to high school for these middle schoolers (PAR Cycle 3, October 9, 2018). Maggie would like to see these programs continue to grow and to bring in more students from the high school to support learning in the middle school.

Improve Flex Time

Table 24 shows one major weakness that Maggie saw in the middle school program, and that was the use of Flex Time (n=6), a pastoral care time that is used daily in the middle school. The high school has an equivalent, which is called Panther Block, and during this time students either meet in their Advisory group, have scheduled activity meetings, or use this as free time. One significant change Maggie stated she wanted to make was to provide activities for students during Flex Time. She was visibly frustrated when talking about Flex Time, saying:

I’m trying to get my head around the purpose of Flex. What is the purpose of Flex? We could use that to run things that are more valuable for kids, but it has this fun kind of time, and this has how it has been billed. (PAR Cycle 3, October 9, 2018)

She expressed passionate feeling that Flex Time could be used better, but wondered “how do we change the culture of Flex” (PAR Cycle 3, October 9, 2018)? She was planning on meeting with the middle school administration and forming a committee to look at changing Flex Time to make it more beneficial for students. She said this would be an ideal time to work with eighth graders on the transition to high school and to possibly work with high school Advisory groups to enhance exposure to high school students.

Bump Up Day

Maggie and I spoke at length about having a bump up day where students from the eighth grade come to the high school to mingle with students from high school and get a chance to meet ninth grade teachers. She said: “It would be great to have a bump up day where they (middle school students) visit the high school. It would be comforting for kids to have a connection with teachers that understand the ninth-grade age group” (PAR Cycle 3, October 9, 2018). I agreed with her and suggested that there is an ideal day for this to happen. Seniors in the IB Diploma program end school in late April to study for their final IB exams. The first day that seniors are away is used by the high school science department to run the Group 4 Project for juniors, which is a mandatory interdisciplinary science project. On this day, seniors are off campus, and the juniors are in the science labs collaboratively designing and running experiments and are not attending their classes. This would be an ideal day to have a bump up day for eighth graders to visit since classes are disrupted due to the Group 4 Project. I mentioned this day to Maggie, and she is going to take my suggestion to the middle school and high school administrations to see whether a bump up day can happen on this date. During this day, students would have a chance to meet several ninth-grade teachers and to interact with ninth grade students. This early familiarity with high school teachers, classrooms, and students is something that would help reduce the stress of the transition to high school for many middle school students.

High School Transfer Themes

On October 12, 2018, I met with António, the head of science for the high school, for about an hour to discuss his views and opinions on my CLE presentation and to learn what transfer themes he took from the presentation. I audio recorded our conversation and later transcribed and coded our discussion so I could qualitatively analyze the themes of transfer

from our discussion. Table 25 presents a summary of the codes, the explanation of the codes, and the number of tallies for each topic.

Antônio is an educator who has the best interests of the students in mind at all times. He is passionate about teaching science and has been an excellent leader for the past three years in the science department. He has brought about a great deal of positive change, which has enhanced learning for the students, and he has been keen to learn about my research findings and apply them to ease the transition to high school science from the middle school. Antônio would like to see a further change at the ISB but has met a great deal of resistance from the ISB administration. It will be interesting to see what he has to say regarding transfer and what he would like to change, based on my research, and what is possible to change, based on the climate at the ISB (Memo, October 12, 2018).

Changes to Summative Assessments

Antônio has worked hard on changing how students are assessed in their science courses at the ISB. Two years ago, he mandated that each summative assessment be standards-based from criterion on the four major ISB learning categories: knowledge with application, knowledge with understanding, scientific inquiry, and data management. Since then, he has looked to improve how students are assessed in ninth and tenth grade. In PAR Cycle 1 and PAR Cycle 2, I was surprised to learn that students found Chemistry 1, an introductory science course every ninth grader has to take the first semester of ninth grade, so difficult. Non-native speakers of English found it particularly difficult which includes the Thai, Japanese, and Korean students. In the spring of 2018, I approached Antônio about how much time the students in my CPR group were spending on their independent research projects (IRP) based on the diaries I analyzed in PAR Cycle 2. Often these students were working on two IRPs at the same time since students can take more than one semester science course in the second semester of ninth grade. I reiterated this information during my

Table 25

Summary of the Transfer Themes from the High School Head of Science

Code	Description	Tally
TRN—COSA	Transfer—Changing of Summative Assessments	12
TRN—ICBT	Transfer—Increase Communication Between Teachers	10
TRN—ESSC	Transfer—End Semester Science Courses	8
TRN—CCV	Transfer—Clear Curriculum Vision	7
TRN—ISO	Transfer—Integrated Science is Offered	7
TRN—COCS	Transfer—Changing of Course Selection	5
TRN—USG	Transfer—Unclear School Goals	5
TRN—TCEA	Transfer—Teacher Check Ego and Attitude	4
TRN—RSS	Transfer—Remind Students of Stress	3
TRN—HSWT	Transfer—Help Students Work Together	2
TRN—ETT	Transfer—Enhance Teacher Training	1

CLE presentation and António was quick to point out that changes have been made starting in the fall of 2018.

Table 25 shows that António's most common coded response was about changing how students are summatively assessed in high school science courses (n=12). During our interview, António expressed that changing how students are assessed in high school science was "fixable" (PAR Cycle 3, October 12, 2018). In the past, students in Chemistry 1 had to do two IRPs in one semester, which is a great deal of research, analyzing, and writing. The results of PAR Cycle 1 and PAR Cycle 2, suggested this was incredibly stressful and time-consuming for students, and the science department realized that students are receiving too many large, labor-intensive IRPs in ninth and tenth grade. Starting in the fall of 2018, IRPs are now only done in Chemistry 1, Biology 2, and Physics 2, while Physics 1 uses several small laboratory assignments, Chemistry 2 does a literature review, and Biology 1 creates a poster. This reduction in IRPs in the first semester from two to one is a significant stress relief for students which will help ease the transition into the high school sciences. Reducing the number of IRPs in each science discipline also allows students to be summatively assessed in more creative ways, such as a poster or literature review, and will enable students to build necessary inquiry skills in Physics 1 without worrying about writing a lengthy laboratory report.

Increasing Teacher Communication

Table 25 shows that increasing teacher communication was the second most coded response from our interview (n=10). António was quick to point out in our conversation that the science teachers at the ISB "don't talk enough" (PAR Cycle 3, October 12, 2018) to one another about learning. He wished that teachers could "pack their egos away" (PAR Cycle 3, October 12, 2018) and find time to collaborate. He stated, "I would love to see more regular scheduled time where you have your eighth-grade teachers and ninth grade teachers together,

let's talk" (PAR Cycle 3, October 12, 2018). The ISB has given science teachers time to meet as a large group, from kindergarten to twelfth grade. However, when these meetings take place "it turns into, oh, that's a cool idea; that's a cool idea" (PAR Cycle 3, October 12, 2018) and no communication happens regarding learning or content. There are no meetings between eighth and ninth grade teachers, or fifth and six grade teachers, the two areas where there are significant academic and social-emotional transitions. This lack of meeting is true for all subjects in the school and is not unique to science. When I asked António why this happens in such a high-stress academic environment, he said, "that just shows the kind of leadership struggles and leadership issues we have here" at the ISB (A. de Andrade, personal communication, October 12, 2018). He also said, "People just don't know. It could be partly my own fault, partly the fact that there's 60 different classes I have to manage within a department that I can't be everywhere at once" (A. de Andrade, personal communication, October 12, 2018).

No Clear Curriculum Vision

António sighed, there is "no clear vision on curriculum" at this school, "this place doesn't have focus. If I asked what our goals are for the next five years, nobody knows. We keep jumping from one cool thing to the next cool thing; it's frustrating" (PAR Cycle 3, October 12, 2018). The ISB has had a written curriculum for some time, but there is no oversight on whether teachers are following the curriculum. During PAR Cycle 2, António and I were a part of the science curriculum planning meetings in which we met with the elementary and middle school science department heads to align the curriculum from kindergarten to tenth grade using the Australian Science Curriculum and standards. There still is no oversight on whether teachers are following the curriculum, and no meetings are taking place between transition grades to ensure smooth passage from one school to another.

There is a clear link between lack of communication and no clear curriculum vision at the ISB.

The teachers in the science department for years have been against the scheduling of semester science courses, but they remain for reasons that no one can explain. In 2013, the year before I arrived at the ISB, the science department spent a great deal of time redeveloping the science curriculum to make ninth and tenth-grade science courses integrated. During a science department meeting, the Director of the school, Andy Davies, entered the meeting and told the department that the classes in ninth and tenth grade will be semester-long courses, that they could not be integrated, but had to be biology, chemistry, and physics, and gave no explanation to why the changes had to be made. Since António arrived as head of the department in 2015, he has fought an uphill battle to have these semester courses eliminated and have integrated science taught in grades nine and ten to no avail. He said, “I have pushed that as far as I can” and there is still no change in the semester science courses on offer (A. de Andrade, personal communication, October 12, 2018). António would prefer to have a yearlong integrated science course in ninth grade that had “elements of physics, chemistry, and biology where you are exploring those concepts in a variety of different ways” (PAR Cycle 3, October 12, 2018).

The order in which students can take science courses changed in 2018 in part due to the findings of my PAR. Students in ninth grade now have a choice between taking either Chemistry 1 or Biology 1 in the first semester of their freshman year, instead of being required to take Chemistry 1. This course change has given English as Additional Language (EAL) students more choice along with the general student population in their first high school science course. António mentioned that this also allows more scheduling flexibility for teachers and “takes off some of the stress at least for half the kids” (PAR Cycle 3, October 12, 2018) when deciding which introductory science to take first. Giving students a choice in

ninth grade has helped to make the transition from middle school to high school more equitable.

I could tell that our conversation had brought back several frustrating moments for António, who sees the ISB as a school with a tremendous amount of potential (Memo, October 12, 2018). He expressed frustration in “getting caught up in the new mundane here and just putting out fires and reacting to fires rather than clearing all the bullshit” (PAR Cycle 3, October 12, 2018). I said to him, “it seems like a good burn is needed” (Memo, October 12, 2018). He agreed, “a good burn is exactly what is needed. You need to clear out that wood, clear it out for somebody to tend to. It is hard to burn stuff down” though (PAR Cycle 3, October 12, 2018).

Summary

In PAR Cycle 1, students found that academic stress, time management, social pressures, and high school teacher relationships were the most stressful aspect of the eighth to ninth grade transition. Later in their ninth-grade year, PAR Cycle 2 showed that finding a balance between academics and after school activities, internal pressure to succeed, academic grades, and the amount of school work were the most significant stressors. In PAR Cycle 3, the CPR students were asked to reflect on the most stressful aspect of the eighth-to-ninth grade transition. The students stated that time management, the amount of school work, after school activities, final exams, and thinking about university were the most stressful aspects of the transition. Now that the CPR students were entering tenth grade, they were most stressed about time management and their academic grades. When asked what they were most concerned about later in tenth grade, the students responded that university planning, time management, and their academic grades were their most significant stressors.

During a CLE on September 20, 2018, I asked eight ISB staff members what they thought the most significant stressors were in the eighth-to-ninth grade transition and they

responded with amplified expectations, concerns about the future, social uncertainty, academic grades, finding a balance, time management, and parental stressors. These CLE participants were then asked about the main stressors in tenth grade and they responded with final exams, summative assessments, GCW signups, and sports and activity tryouts as the most significant stressors. Two participants of this CLE, the eighth-grade counselor and the high school head of the science department were asked about what transfer they were able to take from the CLE. Maggie, the eighth-grade counselor thought that parents needed to be educated about their children leading a healthy and balanced lifestyle and to understand the academic stress involved in the transition. Antônio, the head of the high school science department, thought that changes in how students are summatively-assessed in high school and increasing teacher communication between eighth and ninth grade were the two biggest areas of transfer for him.

In Chapter 8, I discuss the findings and the extant literature from my PAR. I then provide key assertions, a new theory, and summary of this discussion section. I write about the implications of my research to policy and practice at the ISB, how the data I collected contributes to research in middle school to high school transitions, and I write about the limitations of my study. Finally, I address how my leadership has developed throughout this investigation.

CHAPTER 8: IMPLICATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Introduction

This chapter begins with a restatement the original intent of this PAR and a discussion of the results of PAR Cycles one, two, and three. The chapter also contains a re-analysis of the findings through the lens of the extant literature previously examined in Chapter 2. I then make assertions based on the findings and submit a new theory for the middle school to high school transition. Next, I explore the implications of this PAR research. Specifically, I introduce policy changes that the ISB should consider to decrease the stress of transitioning from eighth grade to ninth grade at the school. I also discuss how my practice as an educator has changed through this action research and what further research should be considered to improve this transition at the ISB and the context in which this research should take place. I then discuss the East Carolina University, EdD frameworks used in this study and the limitations for this study. In the final section, I discuss my personal learning and leadership development after completing this research.

Original Intent of this PAR

Theory of Action and Aim Statement

With my Theory of Action, I wanted to understand the difficulties students encounter during the transition from middle school to high school at the ISB and find ways to suggest changes to ease this transition for students. The transitioning students in the CPR—Thai, Japanese, Korean, and American members of the class of 2021—helped me to understand why the passage from middle school is difficult academically and social-emotionally, which allows opportunities for changes at the ISB to ease the transition for future students. My FoP aimed to improve the academic and social-emotional transition from middle school to high school by creating a collaborative research team of 12 students. Through a wide range of qualitative methods, I collected and analyzed student data, which allowed me to establish

policies, procedures, and rituals for the transition from middle school to high school at the ISB (see Figure 3). Through the experiences of these 12 students, we were better able to understand the difficulties of the transition and to recommend changes based on the experiences students encountered with the transition to improve this passage for future students. This study took place from August 2017 to October 2018 over the course of three action research cycles.

Focus on Equity

This transition was not equitable for all of the students involved. The challenges displayed in Figure 1 were illustrated the inequitable aspects of the transition. The micro challenges were academic demands on students and teacher perspectives, general adolescent changes (physical and social-emotional), counselor overload, and cultural differences. The meso or organizational challenges were the counseling department, parent contact not differentiated, different grading systems between middle school and high school, and teacher alignment on assessments. The major macro concern was the IB Diploma graduation requirements.

Ninth-grade students are at an age where adolescent physical and emotional changes occur, making the transition to high school challenging. Academic demands also increase when students reach high school to better prepare them for the IB Diploma Programme in eleventh grade. Depending on culture, this academic stress is not experienced equitably. Parental pressure placed on students to succeed is significant in Confucius Heritage Cultures (CHC), which means students in these cultures experience more stress from home to do well in school than other cultures at the ISB. In 2017, there was a reorganization of the high school counselors from one counselor in ninth grade, to three counselors from grades nine to twelve, to better accommodate the social and emotional needs of the high school students.

The counselors are still overloaded by the demands placed on students, which means that students may not be receiving appropriate counseling to deal with their transition stress.

Study Setting

The setting for my inquiry was the International School Bangkok,—which is located on the outskirts of Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand, with a population of 8.28 million according to the 2010 census (“Bangkok Population 2017,” 2017). The ISB is a private, nonprofit school, founded in 1951 and originally called the International Children’s Center (H. Albert, personal communication, September 25, 2017). There are over 60 nationalities of students at the ISB with a total enrolment of close to 2000 students.

The CPR Participants

The participants in my CPR group initially numbered 12 and came from the four largest nationalities at the ISB (i.e., Thai, American, Japanese, and Korean), three high school counselors, and one eighth grade counselor.

PAR Cycles Results

PAR Cycle 1

In PAR Cycle 1, I surveyed students using Google Sheets to inquire about the most stressful aspects of the middle school to high school transition at the beginning of ninth grade. Once the students had completed this survey, I met with them individually to ask clarifying questions about their survey results and asked them more detailed questions about their transitions. PAR Cycle 1 concluded with students drawing the most stressful aspect of the transition and answering follow up questions regarding their drawing. The significance of using a drawing to collect qualitative data was to allow CPR participants an opportunity to think in more depth about their most significant stressor and to draw it. This data collection method allowed each participant to focus more on what they found stressful and once their drawing was complete, a starting point for me to ask more detailed questions. I also met with

the high school counselors during PAR Cycle 1 and asked them to draw the most stressful aspect of the middle school to high school transition and to elaborate on where they saw themselves in their picture. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed; I then coded the transcriptions to see which themes emerged. The emerging themes (and subthemes) from PAR Cycle 1 were academic stress (homework, faster pace of learning, more assessments, more difficult course work, GPA, grades and university acceptance), time management (balancing after school activities with academic demands, lack of sleep, lack of free time), social pressures (change in friendships, peer competition, internal pressure) and student-teacher relationships (high school teachers were more strict and had higher standards than middle school teachers). These transition theme stressors were also apparent in the extant literature in Chapter 2.

PAR Cycle 2

In PAR Cycle 2, I asked each student to take a photograph of the most stressful aspect of the transition from middle school to high school as they saw it midway through their ninth-grade year. I then met with the students in three small groups where students were able to see all of the photos taken by the CPR group. In these small groups, each student was able to speak about the themes they saw in the picture and to explain their photo to the group. Each group then determined a consensus. A consensus was necessary to understand if everyone in the CPR group indeed experienced the stressors presented in the photos. After reaching an agreement, each group session was audio recorded and transcribed. Once I completed the transcriptions, I coded and tallied the results to identify which themes were emerging in PAR Cycle 2. The emerging themes from PAR Cycle 2 all centered around student academic stress; these themes were finding a balance between academics and activities, internal pressure to succeed, academic grades, the quantity of school work, socializing, social media, personal responsibility, after-school activities, and external pressure to succeed.

For PAR Cycle 2, I also asked three students to keep a detailed diary of how they were managing their time in for one week in March of 2018 on a Google Document. I then coded their responses and found that students were spending most of their time outside of school on ISB homework, after school activities, and school work outside of the ISB.

PAR Cycle 3

PAR Cycle 3 took place from August to October 2018. In PAR Cycle 3, I surveyed the students in my CPR group and asked them questions regarding their transition from middle school to ninth grade and about their tenth-grade transition. By this point, my CPR group was reduced to six students. Each answer provided by the survey questions was coded. When students looked back at the ninth-grade transition, they thought that time management and the amount of school work were the most stressful aspects of the transition from middle school to high school, followed by after school activities, final exams, planning for university, and academic grades. Academic pressure, Global Citizenship Week (GCW), peer pressure, and academic schedules were all singular responses.

During PAR Cycle 3, I also set up two individual interviews with Niran (a male Thai student) and Gary (a high school counselor). Niran thought that the pressure to succeed had not changed from ninth to tenth grade and that he had improved his time management. Despite the pressure to succeed at the ISB, Niran was living a healthy and balanced life between school and activities. Gary thought that time management was the most significant stressor for students in tenth grade and that amplified academic expectations are present at the beginning of tenth grade. He also said that student happiness and wellbeing is not the main concern of parents, teachers, administrators, and counselors at the ISB. My impressions of these two interviews are displayed in detail as vignettes in Chapter 7.

Students were most stressed about time management and their academic grades at the beginning of tenth grade. Activities, increased homework, increased difficulty in their

courses, ROTC (for male Thai students), academic schedule, school work, and Thai class coursework were all singular responses to significant stressors at the beginning of tenth grade. When students were asked about what future stressors, they were most concerned about in tenth grade, they responded with university planning, time management and academic grades/GPA, after school activities, school work, increased difficulty in classes, future and career. Final exams, IB Diploma courses, less free time and lack of sleep were all singular responses.

On September 22, 2018, I oversaw a Community Learning Exchange (CLE) in which I presented my PAR Cycle 1 and PAR Cycle 2 findings to a group of eight ISB colleagues during a professional development day. During this CLE, the participants individually had to draw what they thought was the most stressful aspect of the eighth to ninth grade transition and then come up with a consensus from their eight drawings. This was illuminating for the participants since they had to communicate with peers in both middle school and high school and come to an agreement on what the biggest transition stressors were from a school perspective instead of their own academic specialty. An agreement was determined; they were then able to see the illustrations from the CPR group and make comparisons to their own pictures and consensus. The CLE group then saw the results of the Photovoice data collection in PAR Cycle 2, and then actively participated in drawing Journey Lines of what they thought the most stressful aspect of the tenth-grade transition was. Each participant filled out a survey and also wrote down a detailed description of their Journey Line, which I later coded for analysis. Final exams, summative assessments, GCW signups, sports and activity tryouts, grade checks, end of year goodbyes, and IB course selection were the most significant perceived stressors for students in the tenth grade. End of season tournament or performances, final grades, making new friends, and no calendar breaks in the second semester and time management were all singular responses.

I learned in PAR Cycle 3 that teachers and administrators at the ISB perceive the stressors that students are going through differently than the students. Students were stressed about planning for university, managing their time, performing well academically, participating in after-school activities, school work, increased difficulty in classes and their future after high school. Teachers and administrators in my CLE thought students were most stressed about final exams, summative assessments, GCW signups, sports and activity tryouts, grade checks, end of the year goodbyes, and IB course selection.

In October 2018, I then met with the eighth-grade counselor Maggie Hughes and the high school head of science, António de Andrade, to discuss what they were able to take from my CLE presentation. I interviewed each participant and later coded their responses to determine what areas of transfer they thought could be changed from their perspective to make the middle school to high school transition easier. Maggie thought that parents needed to be educated about their children having a healthy and balanced lifestyle and about the academic stress their children encounter in high school as her top two transfer themes. Earlier exposure to high school teachers, earlier exposure to older students, better use of Flex time, making the transition more comfortable, grade nine bump up day, educating parents on college counseling and reducing fear and anxiety were her other responses.

António thought that changing the summative assessments in high school science and increasing communication between teachers in eighth and ninth grade were the two most significant themes of transfer. He was also in favor of eliminating semester science courses, having a clear curriculum vision, offer integrated science courses, changing the course selection process in science, having more explicit school goals, asking teachers to check their egos and attitudes when collaborating, stop reminding students of stress, help students work together, and enhance teacher training.

Discussion

In Chapter 2, I provided the literature review for my study. In this section of Chapter 8, I review the extant literature from Chapter 2 and compare my research findings to the researched literature. I discuss the theoretical frameworks that were used to inform my FoP. The key theoretical frameworks that helped me to understand equity from multiple points of view were the psychological, political-economic, and socio-cultural frames. Analysis of teacher-student relationships was performed through the psychological and socio-cultural frameworks. Evaluation of social pressures that students encountered was accomplished through the psychological and socio-cultural frameworks. A summary of increased academic demands and grades/GPA was performed through the psychological framework. Evaluation of time management and balance between school and activities was through the political-economic framework. A summary of university planning was through the psychological, political-economic, and socio-cultural frameworks and internal pressure was through the psychological and socio-cultural frameworks.

Findings and the Extant Literature

The five major components of my literature review were:

- Physiological and cognitive changes
- Psychological changes and challenges
- Socio-cultural context for transitions
- Shifting academic demands
- Complexities of transitions

Through the course of my three Participatory Action Research (PAR) cycles several themes I located in the literature were confirmed, and others emerged, mainly because the majority of the studies I referenced were from public schools in the US, which have different transition themes than a wealthy, private international school in Thailand. The transition themes of this

study evolved as the students transitioned through ninth grade and into tenth grade. Several themes were present throughout the three PAR Cycles, such as academic stress, while others were only present in one cycle, like teacher-student relationships.

Teacher-student relationships. When students enter high school, there are two significant changes they encounter on the first day of school, and those are new teachers and new academic surroundings. The relationship between teachers and students is important in the academic growth and development of a student and these relationships are critical for a successful transition from middle school to high school. Teachers can maximize the learning potential of adolescents and to be a positive influence in the lives of their students, not only as an educator but as an adult who shows interest in their success. The psychological and socio-cultural frames were the two frameworks that I used to analyze teacher-student relationships.

Psychological frame. Teachers play a significant role in making students feel comfortable and welcomed when they enter high school. Academic and social-emotional transitions are more natural when students feel comfortable with their teachers. This connection enables students to have an additional adult they can talk to if they are having difficulties in school. A teacher who is unwelcoming and distant can often negatively affect a student's self-esteem, which can stifle the academic and social-emotional development of a young adult. An inspirational relationship between a teacher and a student can help an adolescent find an academic passion that can potentially lead to a career.

Socio-cultural frame. In Confucian philosophy, there is a concept known as filial piety, which is a virtue of respect for one's parents, elders and ancestors (Otto, 2016) and where "unconditional love and filial piety are mutually constructive" (Li, 2012, p. 38). Students from Confucius Heritage Cultures have a great deal of respect for their teachers as elders and try to please them with their effort. This is easier for students to do if they have a

positive relationship with their teachers. According to Roybal et al. (2014), caring and accommodating teachers are more likely to ease this difficult transition than more uncompromising and intimidating teachers. For example, in PAR Cycle 1, Ji Su said, “I feel a gap between the teachers. I don’t really feel very comfortable” (PAR Cycle 1, November 1, 2017).

Social pressures. Students transitioning from middle school to high school often find that they have to forge new friendships. Young adults at this age are trying to find themselves while also distancing themselves from their parents, so social pressure can be significant at this time in a student’s life. Adolescents achieve their sense of belonging in school from the social climate of the school. The relationships they build helps them to better adjust to the numerous stressors they encounter in the middle school to high school transition (Juvonen, 2006).

Psychological frame. Children come to feel, sense, and understand their identity from their family when they are young. When they reach high school, their bodies are physically and emotionally changing causing them to seek out a new identity from their friends and surroundings. The friendships that they choose can either be beneficial or counterproductive. In the case of the ISB, it is considered cool to get good grades, and students place a great deal of pressure on themselves to succeed.

Socio-cultural frame. Adolescents from Confucius Heritage Cultures tend to work together in small social groups when they study. Young adults from this culture try to work with their peers to enhance their understanding when their friends are uncertain are struggling. This is different from western cultures who tend to be more individualized and competitive with their work. Both approaches can cause a young adult to experience a great deal of pressure in an academic setting. Erikson (1968) stated that one of the primary developmental tasks in adolescence is to become a member of a peer group, which allows

young adults to seek out their individual interests and uncertainties while having a sense of belonging by being a part of a group. However, there are multiple social pressures beyond peer acceptance. Conformity to group interests and desires is necessary when you belong to a group. This assertion was supported during PAR Cycle 1 and 2. For example, high school counselor, Gary said, these students have middle school friendships that are “still fluid, kids are goofy, making friends, losing friends, there is a lot of drama that spills over from the middle school years” (PAR Cycle 1, November 10, 2017).

Increased academic demands. In addition to creating new relationships with high school teachers and peers, students encounter an increase the difficulty in their courses. This increased academic demand puts a great deal of stress on students in the middle school to high school transition.

Psychological frame. Increased academic demands in high school can cause students a great deal of stress. This increased in academic difficulty usually means that students are spending more time with their studies, which means they have to make sacrifices with their time elsewhere, which can stifle their development as a human being and lead to self-doubt. Alspaugh (1998) wrote that many students suffer a loss in academic achievement when transitioning from eighth to ninth grade because they cannot keep up with the demands. This idea was evident in all three PAR Cycles. For example, high school counselor, Juanita, describing her drawing said,

In middle school, I have the smaller books just to indicate that I think that it felt more manageable to them in those core subjects. I included science into this too; I just did three. In high school, it's the volume of work and depth, and it's the expectations have risen. I have met with almost all my freshman, there are a couple more I need to meet, but consistently what they have said is that they are working way harder than in middle school and the expectations are higher. (PAR Cycle 1, November 1, 2017)

Grades and GPA. Increased academic demands mean that achieving high grades can be challenging and stressful once a student enters high school. The ISB makes this part of the

transition more difficult by having two different grading systems between middle school and high school. Academic grades and Grade Point Average (GPA) become increasingly important in high school since grades now count towards university acceptance.

Psychological frame. Grades and GPA can significantly affect a young adults self-worth. At the ISB, students often use grades as a way of identifying how successful they are when compared to their peers. Suldo and Shaunessy-Dedrick (2013) found in IB and general education programs that IB high school students felt significantly more stress than their peers in general education. This stress was evident in ninth grade despite the IB Diploma program starting in eleventh grade. Their research reported that students entering an IB high school perceive more stress than students going into a general education high school. This finding was prevalent in all three PAR Cycles. For example, Emily stated that “grades are what your friends, teachers see, and colleges see, it’s like how you perform and how you’re perceived” (PAR Cycle 2, February 27, 2018).

Time management and balance. With increased school work demands students in my CPR group found that managing their time was more difficult in high school than in middle school. In addition to more challenging courses, the students also had access to a larger variety of activities which met more frequently than in middle school.

Political-economic frame. Academics are important at the ISB, and students are heavily involved in after-school activities and sports. The structures in place at the ISB enhance the importance of grades and involvement outside of school. The school has fantastic facilities and highly trained and educated teachers. These assets for the school allow for students at the ISB to have advantages that most schools in Bangkok cannot match regarding facilities and teacher quality. Students often find it challenging to balance their time between schoolwork, after-school activities, and their personal lives. Time management

turned out to be a significant stressor in the middle school to high school transition.

According to Suldo and Shaunessy-Dedrick (2013),

Students who transition from middle school to an accelerated high school curriculum, such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma program, may face additional academic challenges than peers pursuing a typical high school curriculum, particularly with respect to performance expectations in multiple advanced classes, preparation for end of- course exams, and service to the community, all of which are components of IB.” (p. 196)

University planning. The increased demands of school work, along with concerns about GPA, and time management all lead to the next most significant stressor in the middle school to high school transition and that was planning for university. I found this stressor to be surprising so early in high school, as did the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) participants.

Psychological frame. Both parents and students at the ISB strive to attend the best university possible. Students often see their future identities tied to the university that they attend. Where students go to school will have a significant impact on the career they will have and where they will live in the world.

Political-economic frame. The cost of university does affect some of the students who are not inherently wealthy. These students have to work incredibly hard to keep their grades up so they can qualify for student scholarships.

Socio-cultural frame. Children of parents from Confucius Heritage Cultures tend to experience pressure to attend an elite university. A great deal of pride is experienced by CHC parents when their child attends a prestigious university, and it is a social status symbol for these parents and students. In International Baccalaureate (IB) schools, increased competition for acceptance to university along with pressure to produce high scores on standardized tests for university admission has caused high school to be more stressful for adolescents (Suldo & Shaunessy-Dedrick, 2013). Such pressure was prevalent in all three PAR Cycles. For

example, Ella had university acceptance as her main stressor. She described her drawing of two tests, explaining, “One with a good grade and one with a bad grade and then it’s leading to whether or not I’ll get into, er, that test could get someone into a good or bad university or a university at all” (PAR Cycle 2, November 8, 2017).

Internal pressure. The final transition theme of my PAR was one that I was not expecting and barely covered in the literature review in Chapter 2—internal pressure to succeed. The most significant pressure applied to students to succeed in my literature review came from parents, which was true for all the cultures that I researched. This internal pressure to succeed was also prevalent in all the cultures studied and seemed to become more intense the longer students were in high school.

Psychological frame. Young adults experience a great deal of pressure at the ISB to be successful. When I return assessments in my physics classes, I can always hear students clamoring to compare their marks to their peers—on occasion, students even lie, so they do not feel embarrassed by their score. Their academic success shapes the identity of many students at the ISB as they are continually comparing themselves to their peers and applying internal pressure to maximize their scores.

Socio-cultural frame. Students from Confucius Heritage Cultures (CHC) tend to internalize pressure to push themselves to reach their potential. Working harder after not achieving a desired result is common, and through this hard work, students place additional stress on themselves causing them to internalize the pressure they feel. In CHC cultures, perceived stress from students comes mainly from two sources: from within since they have been raised to value hard work and have an earnestness for upward social mobility (Zhang et al., 2016, p. 289 quoted Ang & Huan, 2006, pp. 522—539). Prevalent across all three PAR Cycles, an example is Ella, who wrote:

Of course, I feel pressure to be successful in school. I think a lot of this pressure actually comes from myself because I know I need to get really good grades to get into some of the colleges I want to get into, and if I get bad grades or am unsuccessful in school, I will feel really disappointed in myself.” (PAR Cycle 3, September 25, 2018)

Transitioning from middle school to high school adds the dimensions of physical and psychological adjustments to the general anxiety of the change for the students involved (McLeod, 1970). Major differences between middle and high school, both academics and social, make this transition from middle school to high school difficult (McCallum & Sparapani, 2010). Increased difficulty in course work, concerns about grades, time management, social pressures, teacher-student relationships, university planning and internal pressure were all significant stressors for the students in my CPR group. Now that this information is known, what changes lie ahead for students undergoing this transition in the future is the next question.

Changes. The initial change to come from this study was informing the leadership team of the ISB what the significant stressors were in the transition from middle school to high school. Simply put, the leaders of the school did not know what they did not know. The initial sharing of the research from PAR Cycle 1 and PAR Cycle 2 happened during a CLE held on a professional development day on September 20, 2018. The middle school principal was in attendance and shared a great deal of information from our CLE to the high school leadership team. With the completion of PAR Cycle 3, I share the results of my participatory action research to the high school leadership team and interactively with the high school staff during a high school faculty meeting in the spring semester of 2019.

Key Assertions

Data are collected annually in the form of a survey to see how content teachers, students, and parents are at the ISB. The teachers are asked questions dealing with their academic department, general questions about the ISB, and how nurturing the environment is

at the ISB. Students and parents are surveyed about how nurturing the environment is at the ISB and the quality of the instruction provided by the teachers. The data that are collected are then used by the ISB leadership team to gauge the overall health of the school. The strengths of an online survey are the ease in gathering data, minimal cost is involved, automation in data input and handling, increase in response rate, and flexibility in design of the survey (Sincero, 2018).

Assertion #1. Organizationally, there is no mechanism in place to derive data directly from students about what is essential to them academically and socially. The only mechanism is a survey, which has limitations. One significant deficit in this model is that students are asked questions through a survey that they may not take seriously and are not asked these questions on a personal level by an adult they know well at the ISB. The absence of an interviewer is significant since open-ended questions are not suitable for an online survey because an interviewer is not there to explore the answers (Sincero, 2018). The high school Advisory program offers a setting in which advisors can gather information about the well-being of their students. However, this has limitations as Advisory sessions at the ISB tend to be prescribed, and it is challenging to make connections with students when meetings are only once a week for 45 minutes. After my PAR Cycle 1 and PAR Cycle 2 presentation to the teachers in my CLE, one teacher commented that “I learnt more about 12 anonymous students in two hours than I probably know about my Advisory students” who she had overseen for three years (S. Ferguson, personal communication, September 20, 2018). Consequently, as a result of the information I learned from the PAR, I believe that the collection of data from students should be in a small interactive setting with an adult they know and trust to give students an opportunity to voice their opinions on decisions that affect them and to better understand how students are adjusting to high school. This way, organic

conversations can emerge from the discussions as opposed to students being limited by multiple choice answers on a survey.

Assertion #2. The voices of the students at the ISB have been somewhat marginalized. Since the teachers, administrators, and staff are paid to serve the best interests of the students, hearing from students on a regular basis makes a lot of sense, especially when it comes to significant transitions and stressors in their lives. The Advisory program was set up to help accommodate student voices, but, so far, this has not occurred for every advisor. The teachers at the ISB are too busy with their teaching, grading, meetings, and duties to adequately provide time to get to know and to build trusting relationships. each of their students on a personal level. Consequently, I suggest that teachers at the ISB complete building relationship training courses to create more effective connections and bonds with the students in their Advisory groups. The ISB should fund these courses and provide them on in-service days to minimize teaching interruption during the school year. The courses need to be administered throughout several days at the beginning of the school year before students return to school to maximize the training experience for the start of school. These courses should be interactive so teachers can learn to build relationships with their Advisory students better.

Reexamination of Naming and Framing

Re-Informed Theory

An extensive literature review helped me to understand transition theories, and three participatory action research cycles provided the experience for me to offer my theory of why the transition from middle school to high school is challenging for students at the ISB. It is now evident through qualitative data collection and my subsequent analysis that there are significant stressors that affect the transition from middle school to high school at this sizeable international school in southeast Asia.

Figure 24 provides a visual for the stressful transition at the ISB. In the figure, there is an outline drawing of the lateral view of a human head, which represents a student at the ISB. Inside the head, there are steps representing the transition from middle school to high school. The eighth-grade transition is a small step, while the ninth-grade transition step is significantly larger, representing the difficulty of the transition. The tenth-grade step is not quite as steep, but it is more significant than the eighth-grade transition step since students are preparing for their IB courses in eleventh grade which means an increase in academic difficulty. The next step proceeds into the unknown, represented by an IB cloud since this study stops in tenth grade for the students in my CPR group and the difficulty of this next step is currently unknown for them. I suspect that if these students were followed into eleventh grade that the first year of the IB Diploma programme would be a significant stressor from my experience as a seasoned IB Diploma physics teacher.

On the outside of Figure 24, there are several significant stressors that were found to affect the students transitioning. Social pressures experienced in high school are just above the eyes since these are stressors visible daily for students. School work and academic grades are closely tied together as significant stressors which are applying pressure to the student down through the staircase of their academic years. This pressure is more profound the closer the staircase gets to the outline of the head since academic coursework becomes more challenging the further one progresses into high school. Teacher-student relationships are important in the middle school to high school transition, they but tend to fade in significance once students have reached tenth grade. Thus, the arrow points down to the eighth to ninth grade transition. Time management is a significant stressor which is applied to the entire staircase and a significant portion of the head since balancing academic work, activities, and social life is a continuous challenge throughout high school. The clock has no hands to represent the difficulty in students keeping up with time. I found throughout this study that

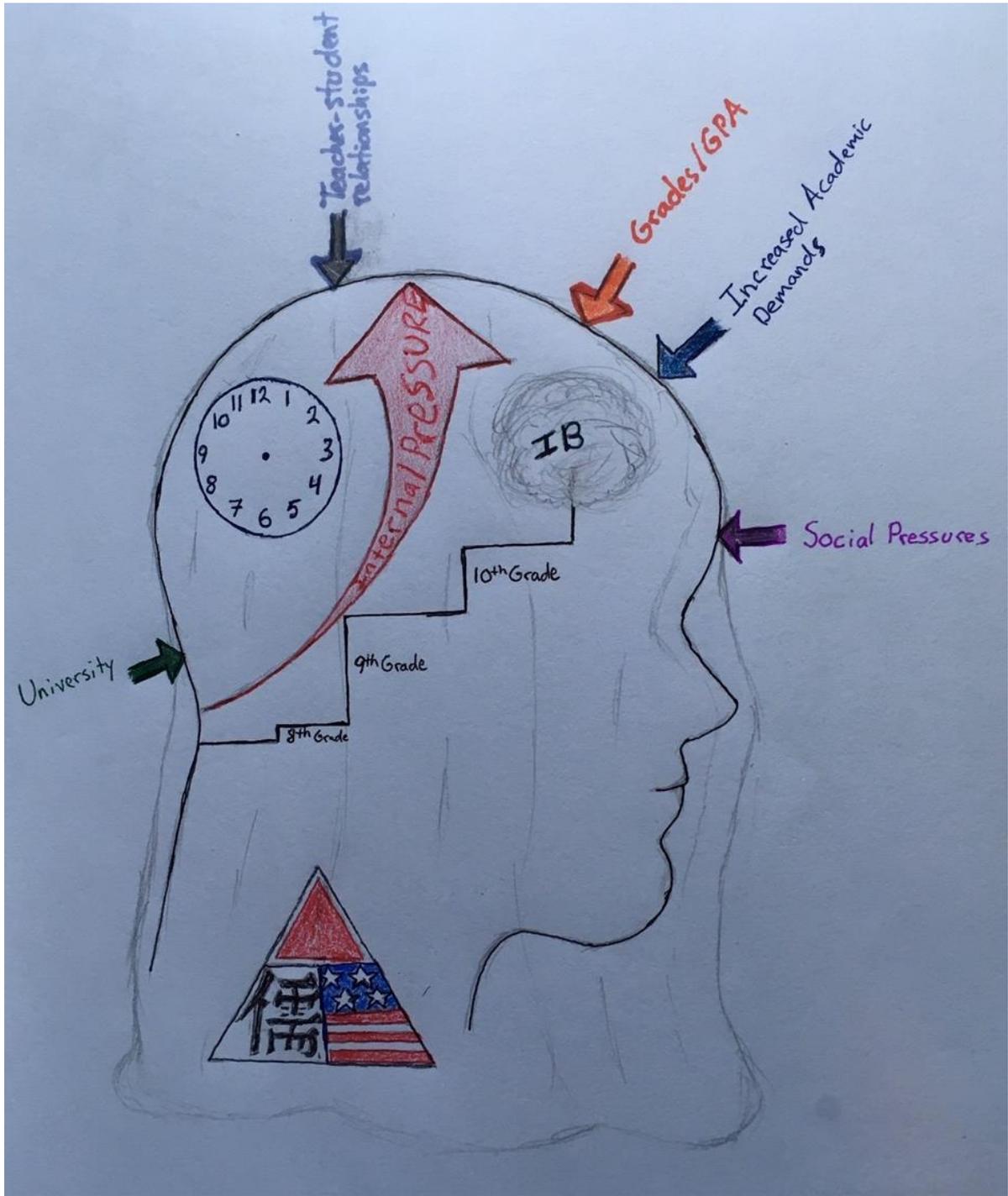


Figure 24. Transition theory at the IB.

university planning is always in the back of the student's minds, even as early as the start of ninth grade, which is why the university arrow is pointing towards the back of the head.

In Figure 24, a thin veil is over the head which represents the culture of the school. The culture of the school is not visible to visitors when they visit the ISB's beautiful, modern, and sprawling campus. However, those who work and study at the ISB can physically feel the presence of the ISB culture and the stress that is involved in this culture. Although this veil is transparent, it adds additional pressure to the existing stressors making the transition more challenging for students and is ever present. The veil has a symbol of a triangle, similar to the ISB logo. The red triangle represents the roof of the school culture which is supported by the Chinese symbol 'rú' which represents the Confucius Heritage Culture on the bottom left, and the bottom right is a portion of the American flag, which represents the other large aspect of the ISB's culture. Both of these structures are the foundation of the ISB and the current culture of the school. Unfortunately, the ISB's culture is a combination of some of the worst aspects of both cultures.

All of these external factors are in the extant literature, along with other stressors that were not as significant in my study, like parental pressure. What I found unique about following the students in my CPR group was that internal pressure increased as they progressed through high school. Feld and Shusterman (2015) found a correlation between self-reported stress and goal valuation, academic self-perceptions, and motivation/self-regulation, which seems to be consistent with what the students in my CPR experienced. Feld and Shusterman (2015) also found that "self-perception is grounded in the group to whom a student is comparing himself or herself" (p. 40), which is the social pressure arrow in Figure 24. The hyper-competitive culture of academics and activities/athletics at the ISB was driving students to internalize the pressure applied to them. Internalizing stress is also a trait of Confucius Heritage Cultures (CHC) since children of these cultures have been raised to value

hard work and strive for upward social mobility (Zhang et al., 2016). The influence of the CHC cultures at the ISB, along with the hyper-competitive nature of the school has caused all the nationalities in this investigation to experience internal pressure to succeed.

In Figure 24, a red arrow starts as a line in eighth grade, representing the fact that the pressure was insignificant at that time. As students progressed through high school this arrow increases in thickness and size representing the fact that internal pressure increases. The arrow of internal pressure is also meant to be the same magnitude as the external arrows, indicating in a Newtonian sense that these stressors outside the student are equal and opposite to the internal pressure generated by the student. All of the external stressors in the drawing help to increase the magnitude of the stress that students are internalizing at the ISB as they transition to higher grades.

In the next section of Chapter 8, I revisit the original research questions from Chapter 1 and provide answers to the questions I had at the beginning of this study. I also revisit the PAR process in general and specifically address the Fishbone and Driver Diagram from Chapter 1. I also explain what I learned that would help inform these diagrams.

Research Questions

The underlying research question for my participatory action research project was: How does the current transition structure at the ISB, through the experiences of a transnational group of student Co-Practitioner Researchers, equitably facilitate the passage students make from eighth grade to high school? The transition from middle school to high school is one of the most difficult academic transition that a student will encounter, regardless of where they go to school. The current structure at the ISB is a one size fits all approach and does not take into consideration the cultural differences; distance students live from the ISB, how involved students are in sports and activities, or how engaged students are outside of school. The transition at the ISB is not equitable for the four largest nationalities,

the American, Thai, Japanese, and Korean students. The Thai, Korean, and Japanese students tend to have more pressure placed on them from their parents to succeed in school culturally than American students. Japanese and Korean students are often taking Korean and Japanese courses outside of their ISB courses, which means less time to work on their ISB studies and less time to lead a healthy and balanced lifestyle. Korean, Japanese, and Thai students are not learning in their native language and often take longer to complete homework assignments than their American counterparts.

My first sub-question was: *To what extent are student academic needs equitably met by the high school transition structure?* Student needs are equitably met at the ISB since every child has access to highly trained teachers and support staff. Teachers and peer tutors are available for students in need, but not every student takes advantage of the teaching resources available to them at the ISB. Thai students, for instance, tend to rely on tutors at home more than their teachers for help (G. Buse personal communication, September 17, 2018). Academic success is culturally more significant in Confucius Heritage Cultures, so Korean and Japanese students tend to seek help more often than American or Thai students.

My second sub-question was: *To what extent are student social and emotional needs equitably met by the high school transition structure?* The ISB provides three social and emotional counselors for grades 9–12. Although these counselors are highly trained and experienced, they have a high number of students for whom they are responsible and, therefore, are overworked. The ISB offers a course for ninth graders (Freshman Seminar) to help with transitional issues, and the ISB Advisory program covers transition topics. Culturally, some students may be hesitant to seek out help when they feel socially or emotionally overwhelmed, but there are services in place to help students, although they are understaffed.

My third sub-question was: *To what extent do the counselors and administrators use student information in the project to change policy and practice?* The eighth-grade counselor is actively seeking out ways to improve the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade after seeing the results of PAR Cycle 1 and PAR Cycle 2. She has been working with the high school after-school activities coordinator and one of the high school counselors to increase the presence of high school students in middle school help sessions. She is working on reaching out to parents of eighth-graders to better inform them of the difficulty in transitioning to high school and how much unnecessary pressure they as parents tend to place on their child. She is looking at making Flex Time in the middle school more productive and using that time to work on transitional issues. She is also proposing that there be a step-up day where eighth graders can come to the high school to be more familiar with the high school setting and the teachers in the high school.

My last sub-question was: *How does my participation in the action research project enhance my leadership practices?* My experience in this PAR has improved my leadership practices. I have learned that I do not need a leadership title to be a leader and that I have been a leader in my school all along. I have learned to listen better as a result of this investigation, and I understand the perspective of my students better. I have learned that taking time to get to know someone on a personal level makes a huge difference in that person giving you honest responses. Most importantly, I have learned that providing a voice to those inequitably treated is essential for progress and change on issues of concern; which I address later in Chapter 8.

Now that there are answers to my research questions, I will use the knowledge I acquired through this participatory action research to suggest both structural and systemic changes to the ISB leadership team to ease the transition students experience from middle school to high school. These suggestions will be addressed later in Chapter 8.

The Fishbone Revisited

In Chapter 1 (see Figure 1) I introduced my fishbone, which described the assets and challenges of doing my participatory action research. The head of the fish and the backbone represented my FoP. The micro assets and challenges highlighted in blue, followed by the meso in orange, and the macro in purple. These lines and boxes that radiate from the backbone represent the structure of the assets and challenges of our project.

When analyzing the fishbone at the conclusion of this project, I used Root Cause Analysis (RCA) to do so. RCA is a tool to help analyze what, how, and why an event happened so that a procedure can be put in place to prevent future occurrences. RCA can also be used to look at opportunities for schoolwide improvement at the ISB to ease the transition to high school. The causes identified as the root causes should be within the ISB management's control to correct (Rooney, 2004).

There were several challenges mentioned at the micro (close-in), meso (organizational), and macro (policy/structural) levels of my fishbone diagram (see Figure 1). When analyzing the challenges, one particular challenge stood out as affecting almost all the other challenges stated in Figure 1, and that was school culture. The school culture of the ISB has:

- Driven academic demands on students.
- Encouraged over-engagement in sports and activities despite encouraging students to live a healthy and balanced life.
- Emphasized having more university counselors than social and emotional counselors which caused a reorganization of the counseling department.
- Authorized two different grading systems between middle school and high school.
- Not enforced teacher alignment on curriculum, coursework, and assessments.
- Encouraged students to pursue the IB Diploma.

The transition from middle school to high school is always going to be one of the most challenging transitions in an adolescent's life due to the physical and social-emotional changes these young adults are going through at this time in their life. High school courses will always be more academically challenging than middle school courses since this is a natural progression in learning subjects in more detail. Students who are considering university will be concerned about their grades and how involved they are in school activities to make their curriculum vitae as appealing as possible for admission to a university. However, school culture can either be supportive, or it can make this transition challenging. Figure 24 shows the school culture of the ISB as a thin veil, which is pulling down all these stressors making the transition all that more intense for the students. If one thing could be changed to help these transitioning students, it would be to change the culture of the school.

Theory of Action Revisited

Before this participatory action research started in the August 2017, I predicted that most of the stress students were encountering in the eighth to ninth grade transition was based upon communication issues between the middle school and the high school. At that time, I was looking at the transition more from my standpoint as a high school physics teacher and the frustrations I had with the school as opposed to thinking about the transition from a student's perspective. This miscommunication included having different grading systems between middle school and high school, a curriculum not vertically aligned between middle school and high school, and teachers who did not communicate between the middle school and high school. The vertical alignment of the curriculum in 2017, allowed time for teachers to meet between the two schools, yet stress remained in the transition. It turned out that a lack of communication between the two schools did negatively impact the transition due to a significant jump in academic difficulty in coursework, which also affected the student's grades and GPA. Better communication between the two schools could ease this academic

transition, and this is one of the recommendations that come from this study. There were other stressors I did not anticipate affecting the transition significantly; examples being teacher-student relationships, social pressures, university planning, school culture, and internal pressure.

From my literature review, I was well aware of parental pressure and peer pressure to succeed in school, but I was surprised by how much internal pressure stressed students in the middle school to high school transition. I was also surprised to see how much culture complicated this transition—both the national culture of the students and the culture of the ISB. I was also surprised to learn that students were already thinking about university planning as early as the beginning of ninth grade since this is something the ISB does not address with students until tenth grade. Teacher-student relationships were more significant to the students than I had anticipated when they entered ninth grade. This is something I had taken for granted since I have not taught first-semester ninth graders in nine years.

Implications

Practice, Policy, and Context

The results of this participatory action research project have the potential to improve the middle school to high school transition at the ISB and improve practice at the school. In this section, I discuss improvements to the counseling services, school communication, inter-school interactions, and to the high school science curriculum.

Counseling. High school students need guidance to make concrete and compounded decisions. These young adults have to handle academic, peer, and parental pressures, the challenges of developing and maintaining relationships, and the demands of university research and planning. According to one influential handbook, “High school counselors are educators uniquely trained in child and adolescent development, learning strategies, self-

management, and social skills who understand and promote success for today's diverse learners" (*The Essential Role of High School Counselors*, 2017, p. 1).

Additional high school counselor. The ISB employs three highly qualified social and emotional support counselors—Juanita, Garry, and Harry. These three counselors are responsible for providing social and emotional support for approximately 600 students in the high school. This ratio of one counselor for every two-hundred students is below The American School Counselor Associations recommended a ratio of 250 to 1, but this ratio was determined in 2005 and applied to public schools in the US and not to private international schools (Carrell, 2006). The ISB also employs four college counselors to support students with the university advising and application process. One college counselor said, "this shows you where ISB's priorities are" (personal memo, September 13, 2017). Budgeting for three counselors each for college counseling and social and emotional support initially existed after the counselor reshuffling in 2017. Then towards the end of the 2016-2017 school year, a parent donated money to cover the cost of an additional counselor, and this money could only be used to add an additional college counselor. Sadly, this reflects where a lot of the ISB communities' priorities are regarding counseling (personal memo, September 13, 2017).

Juanita and I met on December 5, 2018 to discuss student counseling needs and she said that students are different now than 10 or 20 years ago. She said that kids are emotionally younger since they do not have face to face conversations with peers due to their use of technology. She has found that students cannot read faces or personal gestures well and this has negatively affected them as teenagers. She stated that their phones and technology have become a part of who these students are in 2018 and that electronic devices are no longer an extension of the students. The adolescents she encounters on a daily basis need more support than students she had ten years ago, so more of her time is devoted to personal counseling (J. Isabella, personal communication, 12/5/2018). Juanita said, "we

cannot keep doing things the way we used to; the kids have changed. It cannot be ‘business as usual’; the teenagers are different than they used to be” (J. Isabella, personal communication, December 5, 2018).

High school counselors also offer social and emotional support to teachers in need, increasing their 200 to 1 ratio even higher. The 250 to 1 ratio is outdated, and this ratio needs to be lowered to support student social and emotional needs properly. The high school counselors at the ISB are overworked, and when student contact reaches a maximum close to major breaks or final exams, the counselors start to experience compassion fatigue (J. Isabella, personal communication, December 5, 2018). Considering some of the issues they deal with are related to suicidal thoughts and severe depression, there is a need for an additional social and emotional counselor at the ISB. The first significant change I recommend is to add an additional social and emotional counselor to the high school to better support students as they transition through school and to provide for the needs of the students already in high school. The addition of one more counselor would lower the counselor-student ratio and allow students more opportunities to speak with their counselor when they are in need.

Social and emotional course. Carey and Dimmitt (2012) found in their summary of six counseling studies done in the US that school counseling program organization, low counselor to student ratios, counselor time use, and specific school counseling activities have a positive impact on student educational outcomes. Knowledge gained from these six studies indicates that counselors should be used to maximize student benefits. This creates both a professional imperative and an ethical obligation to increase the activities that counselors provide to best support student success (Carey & Dimmitt, 2012).

As of December 2018, the social and emotional counselors were expected to be full-time counselors and to run a course called Freshman Seminar for ninth grade students. To

maximize the use and time of the social and emotional counselors, I propose that the ISB add a ninth-grade health class to the curriculum that encompasses social and emotional support and that this course count as a grade on their transcript. The addition of this course would eliminate Freshman Seminar, free-up time for counselors to focus on social and emotional needs of students, count as an academic course helping students to take it more seriously, and either the physical education (PE) or science departments could teach this class depending on scheduling needs. The ISB already offers an IB Group 4 science course, taught by the PE department, called *Sports, Exercise, and Health Science*. The infrastructure is in place to provide this course, and this is our second recommendation to improve the transition from middle school to high school.

Educating parents. Authentic parent engagement exists when there is a meaningful relationship between parents, teachers, counselors, and school leadership. This group commitment should have a shared goal of maximizing not only learning and academic success, but the wellbeing of students also. Productive communication between parents, teachers, counselors, school leadership, and the community, forms the foundation for cultivating and maintaining partnerships. Schools do not exist in isolation. To significantly impact student outcomes, communication in this partnership needs to be focused on student learning and well-being. Schools have an obligation to help parents understand recent research in schooling and child development and to educate parents on how they can better serve the needs of their children. For school and student initiatives to be effective, the partnership between parents and the school staff needs a reciprocal commitment from everyone involved (*Parent and Community Engagement Framework*, n.d.).

A common theme between the eighth-grade counselor and the high school counselors was educating parents on the stressors of the middle school to high school transition and living a healthy and balanced lifestyle. The eighth-grade counselor Maggie was keen on

inviting parents to school to inform them on the importance of living a healthy and balanced lifestyle and to educate parents on the academic stress involved transitioning into high school through a presentation. Maggie was also enthusiastic about offering an early college information session to parents of eighth-graders to better prepare them for university planning. Maggie and I discussed at length whether this would add additional stress to students in eighth grade, but we both agreed they were already thinking about university and it was best to give information to students and parents so they could make informed decisions going forward. Maggie wanted to stress to the parents that all of the teachers and administrators at the ISB had vastly different high school and college experiences, yet we all made it to the same place. There is more than one way to be successful in life living a healthy and balanced lifestyle is essential to managing stress and maximizing your life expectancy going forward (M. Hughes, personal communication, October 9, 2018).

Juanita, a ninth-grade counselor, has proposed to have high school parents come in for a community meeting to discuss mental health issues. Juanita would like to offer a forum for students, counselors, and adults with mental health issues speak to parents about the struggles of living with mental health issues. She has gained copyright approval to show the movie *Angst* to parents during a potential session to highlight the mental health issues that develop during this time in adolescents' lives (J. Isabella, personal communication, December 5, 2018). Mental health issues are a taboo topic in Thai culture, where people rarely admit they are seeking counseling. Thirteen million (20% of the population) Thai's suffer from some form of mental illness, but only 1.09 million of these Thais regularly undergo treatment (Fernquest, 2012). The social stigma associated with seeking mental health help in Thailand will be difficult for Juanita and the high school counselors to overcome when trying to reach the Thai parent community.

The third proposal to improve the transition from middle school to high school is to have scheduled evenings where parents from the community come to the ISB to learn about the importance of their children living healthy and balanced lifestyles. The ISB can offer a session in eighth grade to parents about university planning, provide a session about the academic, social and emotional stressors in transitioning to high school, and offer an interactive forum where parents learn they about mental health issues that several students face and how to better serve these children with mental health issues.

Improved communication. Valuable communication depends on both actively receiving messages and giving messages. Good schools and teachers are able to do both well and continuously work hard to improve communication. Good communication allows individuals and schools to transmit information, but also encourages effort, helps to modify attitudes, and encourages thinking (Davies, n.d.). No school has a system where communication is perfect, but the ISB has areas in which improved communication would lead to a smoother transition for students moving from middle school to high school.

Common grading system. The first area in which communication needs to improve is agreeing on a grading system that is *consistent* between both middle school and high school. Students who have transitioned from the middle school at the ISB are confused at first when they receive marks based on a 7-1 scale. In middle school, there are different ISB grade definitions than in high school. The seven descriptions in middle school are Excelling (E), Meeting/Excelling (ME), Meeting (M), Approaching/Meeting (AM), Approaching (A), Developing/Approaching (DA), Developing (D), and Incomplete (I). When students transfer from the ISB in middle school to another school, their grades are automatically adjusted to a 7-1 scale so their new school can make sense of their achievement level. I propose to keep the seven current middle scoring criteria but also add the numbers 7-1 to them also to ease confusion about grades once students reach high school.

Teacher collaboration time. For a universal grading system to make sense, it would need to be agreed upon by both the middle school and high school teachers. This leads to my next recommendation which is to start professional development time between teachers in eighth and ninth grade in common subject areas. Teachers between the two schools would be able to moderate student work and agree on a score that would reflect this effort in both eighth and ninth grade. This would allow teachers in both schools to share information and resources on what they are teaching and to help understand the academic transition that students are going through. Ultimately, it would be ideal if teachers taught in both the middle school and high school, but the ISB is content to have teachers specialized as high school or middle school teachers.

Reducing the academic jump. Once this collaboration has started, I suggest closing the academic gap between eighth and ninth grade. At the moment students find a significant increase in academic rigor in ninth grade when compared to their eighth-grade experiences. Reducing this academic jump in difficulty would decrease the academic stress that students experience when they transition to high school. Academic grades in high school count towards university transcripts, so an increase in academic coursework can have a negative impact on student morale if they do not reach their goals. Increasing the difficulty of eighth grade would allow students experience with more academic rigor without it negatively affecting their university transcript. It would also help to identify students who are struggling academically and support them prior to moving on to high school.

Assessment calendar. My next suggestion to improve communication in the transition from middle school to high school is to create a high school assessment calendar where teachers have to fill in assessment dates. This would allow teachers a forum to coordinate assessment dates with their busy schedules. Minimizing the number of assessments on a given day will reduce the academic pressure students experience once they enter high school

due to the increased number of assessments they have to take. As of December 2018, an attempt has been made to create an assessment calendar in the IB Diploma grades, but nothing exists in grades nine and ten.

Activity counseling. One significant stressor that students place on themselves when they enter high school is taking on too many after-school responsibilities regarding clubs and sports. One change I want to suggest is to provide students with time in eighth grade where they learn about the activities and sports offered in high school and about the time commitments for these activities. Sports and activities do exist in middle school, but there is not that much variety. There also is not an emphasis on being involved in middle school since there is no pressure to achieve activity and sports hours to satisfy high school CAS (Creativity, Action, Service) requirements. When students reach high school, there is an explosion of options to choose from and students often overcommit themselves which increases the difficulty of their transition from middle school since these activities are time-consuming. Students should be encouraged to follow their passion, but not to overextend themselves. There is also an American cultural influence of being heavily involved in sports and activities at the ISB. This cultural phenomenon influences other nationalities and is an integral part of the ISB culture.

Inter-school interactions. When transitioning from middle school to high school there are several unfamiliar situations that can make this transition difficult: new teachers, a new academic setting, and older students. I propose to try to make the unfamiliar as known as possible prior to the high school transition taking place.

Bump up day. The eighth-grade counselor Maggie suggested the idea of a high school “Bump Up” day where eighth-grade students would be able to mingle with high school students and meet ninth grade teachers (M. Hughes, personal communication, October 9, 2018). Several of my CPR group members were also in favor of this idea. When Maggie and

I discussed this idea, I proposed that this day should take place when the eleventh-grade students are doing their Group 4 project in April, since that is the first day that seniors are off studying for their IB exams. This day creates a bit of chaos in the school schedule and adding a bump up day would allow for a particular schedule to be designed where eighth-grade students are paired with a ninth-grade student and experience high school for a day. Tenth-grade students could use this day as a way of learning about the IB Diploma courses they would take in eleventh grade.

Vertically align the advisory program. My next suggestion would be to vertically align the Advisory program in the middle school and high school to increase communication between grades. Aligning the Advisory program would allow for opportunities for eighth-grade advisories to interact with ninth grade advisories to reduce the intimidation of middle school students mingling with high school students.

High school science course changes. Osbourne (2000) said, “The broad aims of science education are to stimulate and excite pupils’ curiosity about phenomena and events in the world around them” (p. 8). Student curiosity also leads to knowledge since direct practical experience can engage learners on several levels. Through science, students learn how important scientific ideas lead to technological change; which impacts industry, business, and medicine, which improves quality of life. More importantly, students learn to question and discuss science-based problems that may affect their own life, and how these problems affect society and the future of the earth (Osbourne, 2000).

Integrated science. The biology-chemistry-physics sequence of science courses is still the dominant high school science curriculum model in the world. However, the adoption of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) in the US has effectively changed how science is being taught. Integrated science offers an alternative approach to the traditional science curriculum model in high school. No longer are science courses being taught in the

traditional sequence where divisions between the sciences are artificial; integrated science teaches by common scientific themes (Hartley, 2015). Hartley (2015) gave the example of teaching energy by starting with the concept in physics; then apply it to chemistry (energy of chemical bonds and reactions). The students would learn about earth science through convection in the mantle driving plate tectonics and how weather is a dynamic system that moves heat energy away from the equator to cooler areas to the north and south. Ultimately, the students would learn biology through the energy mechanisms in cellular respiration and photosynthesis. Osbourne (2000) succinctly stated about science education, “surely it is the *quality* of the experience, rather than the *quantity*, which is the determining measure of a good science education (p. 9).

The ISB is an international school that receives funding from the U.S. government to operate, and a large portion of the students are American. A great number of ISB graduates go on to university in the US, which means that the ISB’s curriculum needs to be recognized by American colleges and universities. When I was a part of the science curriculum committee, an emphasis on not changing the current science curriculum model in high school and finding an educational system that agreed with the ISB was prioritized. The high school head of science and I argued for change and the adoption of an integrated science course, but politics ultimately decided the current model should stay. After researching this decision, it seems that a well-connected parent wanted this semester science course model for their children so they could apply for universities in the US in the past. If this is indeed true, then why keep this model when the NGSS science curriculum has moved to an integrated science approach, and U.S. universities accept integrated science as a science course? To use a phrase that Juanita said earlier about counseling, it’s because it is ‘business as usual.’ Instead of adapting to changes in science education, the ISB has chosen to keep an outdated model, so feathers are not ruffled in the local community. This is why the Australian science standards

were adopted because they matched best with the ISB curriculum at the time in high school science.

Eliminate semester courses in science. The ISB offers semester courses in biology, chemistry, and physics where students have to take a semester of all three sciences before eleventh grade, and then can choose one or more additional second semester courses in biology, chemistry, or physics to help prepare them for higher-level science courses in the IB Diploma, or to achieve a full year credit in one of the sciences. This current system is costly since it requires a larger teaching staff to run and is not helpful in the transition to high school since students only have these teachers for one semester. This adds additional stress to students since they have to take semester exams in their science courses and not their other academic courses. It is also difficult for students to get to know their science teachers in one semester and by the time they are reaching a comfort level with a teacher, it is time to move on to another science course, and a new teacher since teachers at the ISB tend to specialize in their subject area.

I propose to get rid of the current semester science courses in ninth and tenth grade and to offer integrated science in ninth grade and a traditional science in tenth grade. The high school head of the science department supports this approach, and this would ease scheduling demands for the high school and help alleviate the stress of the middle school to high school transition. If these courses cannot be eliminated, I propose that students in ninth grade have the same teacher for their first and second semester courses to ease the transition of learning the style and demands of a new teacher in the second semester.

Policy Beyond the ISB

The results of this PAR have the potential to influence policy-makers in southeast Asia due to the influence that the ISB has in the region. The importance of multinational

research that listens to the voice of the students as they transition from middle school to high school is significant for organizations that develop standards and policy.

The ISB is a founder member of the International Schools Association of Thailand. Currently, there are 128 international schools in this organization. The schools in this organization share mutually beneficial information and the results of our study could be used by other international schools in Thailand to enhance their middle school to high school transition programs. Thailand is a popular destination for expatriates, and this study impacts the American, Japanese, and Korean communities. The results of this research would allow schools to also look at their school culture to see whether it is enhancing the transition experience or whether it is detrimental. School administrators could also look at the improvements to the transition we are recommending to determine whether they have these structures in place.

EARCOS (East Asia Regional Council Of Schools) is another organization that would benefit from our study. There are 165-member schools along with 150 associate member schools in East Asia. EARCOS supports collaborative educational partnerships within East Asia and worldwide to foster greater access to expertise (“The East Asia Regional Council of Schools,” 2016). There are also regional EARCOS conferences where I could present our finding to leaders of schools. This would allow for dialogue to happen between leaders of schools interested in addressing their middle school to high school transition program and the ISB, allowing me to share our research for the betterment of other schools and the policies they design. Several of these schools are in countries that are influenced by Confucius Heritage Cultures, and the results of this study could change the transition policy in these schools since these schools would be affected by similar cultures.

Research

This PAR project took place in a large international school in southeast Asia that offers the IB Diploma; which means the results of this research could inform other large international IB schools in southeast Asia and beyond. The results of this project are well known in transition research—social pressures, increased academic demands, grades/GPA, time management issues, and teacher-student relationships all play a significant role in middle school to high school transitions around the world. This study also provides insight into the middle school to high school transition at a large international school in southeast Asia and how students in the Thai, American, Japanese, and Korean communities experienced this transition. To my knowledge, this was the first study done on how Thai adolescents experience the academic and social-emotional transition from middle school to high school. This study also found the internal pressure to succeed was a significant stressor in this transition for the nationalities involved, which was not prevalent in my literature review research. This aspect of the middle school to high school transition should be explored further in future studies.

University planning is also a known stressor for high school students, but what I learned in this study is that university planning sessions should be provided before high school to better inform students about their academic and activity choices in ninth grade and beyond. University knowledge before ninth grade would provide a way to educate parents and students about university application requirements, and it would take some of the guesswork and hearsay out of the university planning process. Being more informed could add additional pressures to middle school, and this is something that would need to be studied in the future if earlier university planning is approved.

The internal pressure that students felt to achieve needs to be addressed by policy and in research. The students in the class of 2021 have lived their whole lives with internet access

and have had a handheld device since the invention of the iPhone in 2007. The high school counselor, Juanita, pointed out that these students were different from students from ten and twenty years ago because they lack the social skills that older generations took for granted as a consequence of being enmeshed with technology. Further research needs to be done to determine whether the lack of social skills is driving this internal pressure that students experience to succeed since they struggle to communicate with their peers in person; moreover, research could address whether this observation is a cultural phenomenon of the ISB or southeast Asia.

The importance of school culture is something that should also influence policy and research at the ISB and in the international school communities around the world. The majority of international schools worldwide are influenced by the US, but also by their local culture and customs, making such schools unique from schools in other countries. It is essential for schools to look at how the combination of cultures affects the culture of the school and whether the school culture allows students to live a healthy and balanced life. In the case of the ISB, the school strives for students to live a healthy and balanced life, yet students are either overworked academically, overextended in their activities, have little personal time, or a combination of the three.

This PAR project can contribute to the way practitioners collect and analyze evidence to make decisions and improve school conditions by encouraging researchers to seek out the voices of the students. I learned from my methodology that student voices are critical to understand the stressors that students experience. Through student voices, I learned that not every culture experiences school transition in an equitable manner. Another contribution to the way practitioners collect and analyze evidence would be to look at how school culture affects the stressors that students experience. At the ISB, the culture of the school magnifies these stressors and makes the transition from middle school to high school even more

difficult for students. Another area of research would be to perform this study at another large international school in southeast Asia to see whether students report similar stressors or to do a case study with a school that has done similar research.

Juanita's statement that students are different than they were ten and twenty years ago struck a chord with me. I, too, have experienced this difference in my own interactions with students, and it makes me wonder whether the research out there has caught up with the students of this handheld device generation. Juanita said that these students are "taking off" much later than students she counseled in the past, but they do get there eventually, meaning that they find their way later in life but that they need more support to do so. Future research could address the question of whether the next transition to the IB Diploma is more challenging than what previous young adults experienced due to their lack of social development and their internalization of pressure.

ECU EdD Framework and CLE Axioms

The problem of practice for this participatory action research was deficit-driven. My CPR group set out to understand what makes the transition from middle school to high school so stressful at the ISB and to suggest improvements to ease this transition for future students. The East Carolina University FoP was asset-focused and relied on the transitioning students and counselors to better understand what was stressful about the middle school to high school transition at the ISB. Early on, I realized that the transition is not equitable for the different nationalities involved, and I set out to understand why in order to make suggestions to the leadership team of the ISB on how to improve this transition.

The two CLE Axioms that were essential for the PAR were:

- Conversations are critical and central pedagogical processes
- The people closest to the issues are best situated to address local concerns

Before I started collecting data for PAR Cycle 1, I had to learn about the students that agreed to be a part of this study. I shared with them a video introducing myself and explaining the survey questions I wanted them to answer. Over the course of the three PAR Cycles, I believe I was able to build the trust of the students and that I received honest responses from them.

Building trust was vital since I was trying to elicit accurate and detailed responses from the students in my CPR group. The conversations that I had with each individual in the group, and with the group as a whole were central to my understanding of why the transition is so difficult at the ISB. These conversations were critical since I could ask follow-up questions when I received responses that I was unsure of and could ask the students to elaborate if I thought their answers were too brief.

The students in my CPR group were experiencing the transition through high school on a daily basis, and this experience was challenging for most of them. Listening to their transition experiences, seeing them draw the most difficult aspects of the transition, and describing a photo that showed their most challenging parts of the transition were enlightening. The students brought stressors and issues forward that I had never considered, and it made me more aware as a teacher of students' lives lived outside of school.

The eighth-grade counselor and the high school social and emotional counselors were excellent resources to have in my CPR group. They are most aware of the transitional stresses that students encounter and being so close to the students socially and emotionally; their perspectives were helpful for me to understand the student transition from an informed adults' perspective.

Strengths of Action Research

Herr and Anderson (2015) stated that action research has power. The power is threefold: (1) there is an education of both researcher and participants, (2) the results are

relevant to the local setting, and (3) there is a sound and appropriate research methodology involved. Through action research, trustworthiness is also established between the researcher and the participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated this trustworthiness was created in action research through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. With credibility, action researchers are able to have confidence in the accuracy of the findings. In transferability, findings have applicability in other contexts. In dependability, findings are consistent and could be repeated. In confirmability, findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not by researcher bias, motivation, or interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Limitations

Every study has limitations and this study is no different. During this research, I made every attempt to suspend personal belief and prior knowledge of schooling in order to allow the data to naturally occur and to build a theory of understanding. One significant limitation was the number of student participants. My initial goal was to have at least four students from each of the largest population nationalities at the ISB. Ideally, it would have been nice to have a minimum of two males and two females from the Thai, Japanese, Korean, and American student populations although statistically I would have preferred to have had numerous participants from these student populations because it would have allowed me to have more representative data. I surveyed 153 eighth-grade students, but only 105 responded. The Japanese and Korean population at the ISB is significantly smaller and more transient than the American and Thai population, so finding students who were interested in being a part of this study and were confident they would be at the ISB for the three years of this study was challenging. After presenting my action research project to this group, only 12 volunteered to be a part of the investigation: one Korean female, two Japanese females, one female Thai, four male Thai, and three American females and one American male. The first

limitation to this study was the fact there were not an even number of participants from each nationality.

Another limitation of my data set was the small number of participants from Korea and Japan. It is impossible to say whether the opinions and experiences of one female Korean student and two female Japanese students were representative of the entire Korean and Japanese student population. The male voice was also missing from these two cultures, which is a significant gap in my data collection, especially since boys have different struggles and experiences in this transition than girls. Recommendations for improving this transition are not representative of this segment of the student population, which means the needs of future male students in the Korean and Japanese student populations may not be met fully in this transition from middle school to high school.

The level of English language ability was also something that was not taken into consideration since there were few students to choose from for this investigation. Analyzing this transition from middle school to high school for students of different English-level competencies would have added useful information to this study by learning how significant language acquisition and proficiency affected the difficulty of the transition from middle school to high school.

One of the questions that I asked students before agreeing to be a part of this study was whether they would be at the ISB until at least the end of tenth grade. All the participants assured me that they would be here for the duration of the study. Unfortunately, only six students remained at the end of the action research, which limited the number of responses I received from the group. The departure of students was from one student withdrawing from the study and five others unexpectedly transferring before the start of their tenth-grade year. There were also no Japanese or Korean students remaining once PAR Cycle 3 started, which eliminated these cultural voices from our responses. The absence of these cultures means that

there were only three Americans (one male and two females), and three Thais (two males and one female) remaining at the start of PAR Cycle 3. The stressors reported by these remaining students were from the Thai and American communities, and recommendations from PAR Cycle 3 do not include any Japanese or Korean students. It is unknown from a cultural perspective how the Japanese and Koreans at the ISB are handling the transition into tenth grade. The data collected from PAR Cycle 3 are helpful in understanding the stressors that American and Thai students are encountering in the transition to tenth grade, but no data exist for the Japanese and Koreans are experiencing this transition. Suggestions put forward to improve the transition for students moving from middle school to high school are missing data from Japanese and Korean students for tenth grade. It is possible that our recommendations may not be beneficial for the Japanese and Korean students since the tenth-grade transition is lacking data from these cultures.

My Leadership Development

There is a famous quote from Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw in *Maxims for Revolutionists* (2008), where he writes, “He who can, does; he who cannot, teaches.” Most teachers have probably heard that quote at some point in their lives and have more than likely, taken offense to it. For me, it is another version of this quote that an Irish teaching friend of mine once told me that makes me think about leadership in schools. His quote was, “those who can, do, those who cannot, teach, and those who cannot teach, go into management” (K. Nolan, personal communication, May 19, 2018). Without knowing it, he was speaking about something Scott Adams called the “Dilbert Principle” from his cartoon strip *Dilbert*. Adams explained the principle as “the most ineffective workers are systematically moved to the place where they can do the least damage—management” (as quoted in Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 10). In my nineteen years in education, I have seen my fair share of lousy leadership and too little evidence of quality leadership. These poor

leadership examples were a result of poor training and from not fully understanding the complex realm of organizational leadership. I think every teacher has sat in a meeting with members of their school's leadership team and wondered to themselves if they could do the leadership job better than their boss. I know that I have, so when I had an opportunity to apply for an EdD in Educational Leadership through East Carolina University, I decided this was my chance to see if I could indeed do better than some of my previous supervisors.

Now I understand the importance of building relationships and the importance of giving voice to those that affected by my decisions. I know how to look for solutions to problems through an equity lens. Through my experiences in this doctoral program, I have developed an understanding of how complex leadership is, and I now have a framework from which to view, analyze, and plan effective strategies and that is through an equitable lens. This ability to see problems and solutions through an impartial lens is something that many of my previous school leaders were unable or unwilling to do.

The vast majority of my experience in schools has been through a management system that was top down. The head of school made decisions, or the school board and teachers had to implement these decisions in their classroom. This type of managerial system can be frustrating to work in, especially when the teachers and students do not have a voice in the decision-making process. I have had two official leadership roles over the past nineteen years. My first leadership position was the after-school activities coordinator of Pechersk School International Kyiv (PSI). PSI was the only school that I have worked in where the leadership team gave me the autonomy to run the program as I pleased. I have never been in favor of a top-down managerial approach, so I met with the Ukrainian staff first to see what activities they were interested in overseeing. Several Ukrainian staff members had complained to me that they were not encouraged to run Ukrainian cultural activities, which I thought was absurd for an International Baccalaureate school. By supporting our Ukrainian

staff, Ukrainian art and dance activities were added to the after-school program and were a big hit. I also worked hard to increase the stipends that Ukrainian teachers were given to match that of the expatriates offering activities. Most of the expats lived close to school, while some Ukrainians commuted up to two hours a day to work one way. If these Ukrainian teachers were contractually obligated to offer activities, then they should at least be paid as much as the international staff, to which the school ultimately agreed. This was my first experience in leadership acting to bring equity to the workplace.

My second leadership position was at the American International School of Budapest (AISB) where I served as head of the department for high school science. This position was a leadership position only in the title since the high school principal made all significant decisions about the department. My role was to implement his decisions and try to keep morale up in the department. This experience was far from what I wanted to do in having equitable decisions decided by the science department.

I have learned from this PAR project just how important equity of voice is when one is in a leadership role. I was aware of this fact before doing my research, but it became more evident when I had to sit down and listen to the students. I had forgotten something my first educational instructor told me in university, and that is to think of the job as a service. Teachers provide an education to the students, but teachers are also offering a service and how teachers interact with students will impact their learning, just like having great service in a restaurant affects the dining experience (Memo, August 18, 2018). With this PAR project, I had to get to know these transitioning students on a personal level, to earn their trust, and to understand from their perspective what was so challenging about the transition to high school at the ISB. I had to research and learn about their cultures and understand their journey from their cultural perspective as opposed to my viewpoint as an American teacher. I had to change. I had to change my practices and my ideas about leadership. I had to not only listen

and learn from my superiors and fellow teachers about this transition, but I had to listen to and understand the voice of the students too. What I learned most from this PAR project can be summed up in another George Barnard Shaw quote: “Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything” (Anton, 2015). Not only did I have to change and give the students a voice in this transition, but the school and the leadership team will need to change, too, so students’ transitions to high school can be made easier. The needs of students have evolved over the years, and as a school, the ISB needs to adapt with them.

I first became interested in the middle school to high school transition when I worked at the AISB. As a first year IB physics teacher in 2011, I noticed that there was a definite divide in student achievement in my classroom, where one group of students was scoring significantly higher than the other students. I was curious to know why there was such a discrepancy and realized later in that school year what the top achieving students had in common and what the lower achieving students had in common. The high achieving students did not go through the middle school at the AISB, while the lower performing students did. I checked with the IB chemistry teacher to see whether he saw similar results, and he had. I was especially interested in this phenomenon because the IB physics and chemistry results had been under the world average until I arrived at the school. These students had quality instructors in high school before I arrived, so there had to be something keeping the scores down; it was the preparation that these students had before moving into the IB Diploma program. When I raised this information with the high school principal, it was quickly ignored since it suggested a systematic issue with students transitioning from middle school at the AISB. I remember feeling at the time that this was not an equitable transition for these students and that more needed to be done to prepare them for high school academically.

Broader Possibilities for Sharing Findings

This study has also enabled me to understand better why this school is known as “IS Busy” and what cultural and organizational influences have caused the ISB to be a stressful place to study and to work. The study that I have undertaken with my CPR group has the potential to bring about even more significant changes at the ISB and to give an equitable voice to those that are participating in this challenging transition from middle school to high school. However, as I stated, that potential could be squelched for reasons beyond the integrity of the project findings or my sphere of influence because the organizational institutional systems and power structure may not be persuaded to change.

I have realized that the research that we are doing can impact not only the multi-national students who will transition from middle school to high school at the ISB in the future, but with the publication of our research, our study has the potential to impact other globally based international students undergoing this transition. I have realized through our research that change can stem from a single person or a small group of people and that equity is critical to consider in an academic setting as a leader. With this experience, I have been able to listen better to the needs of students and I have learned how to qualitatively analyze data from the interviews I conducted to show trends in each of the PAR cycles. As a leader in the future, I can see the benefit of coding meetings to look for patterns in conversations that might not be evident while talking.

Multiple Perspectives

As a teacher, this research has allowed me to understand the stakeholders who are involved in making decisions about the transition that students make from middle school into high school and to better understand the politics of how these decisions have been made. By seeking out numerous voices throughout the school for input in this study—from administrators, to counselors, to support staff and students—I have realized how important it

is for a leader to know the perspectives of different people in a school setting and how each level affects the other levels when a decision has been made. Throughout this process, I have become more empathetic to a broader range of people and cultures, which has helped to change my perspective of student achievement through transition and how essential counselors, teachers, and administrators are to a successful transition. This research has also helped me to understand the demanding nature and academic life of students from CHC cultures and how different cultures in an international school shape the culture of that school.

In the classroom, my perspective about myself as a teacher has changed. I have become more empathetic to the students in ninth grade, and I am more aware of how different their experiences in middle school science compares to high school science. I have made a concerted effort to be more open and engaging with the students since one of the significant adjustments in the transition is adapting to demanding teaching styles in high school. I am aware that the courses these ninth graders are taking now do count towards university and instead of being a rigid disciplinarian, I am more flexible with students when it comes to incomplete assignments and late work. I like how the attitude of grading has changed at the school in that not every task is weighted the same and, instead of averaging results, progress is the primary consideration when determining a student's final grade.

As a future leader in a school, I will encounter issues beyond student transitions. I will take with me from this PAR experience and my time working on my EdD the importance of giving a voice to people who do not have it. My decisions will be seen through an equity lens and thought and personable engagement. People affected by my decisions, or the school board's decisions, must be heard and understood. I have first-hand experience as a leader in a school that welcomes dialogue among teachers from my time at PSI, and I have experience of being in a school with a top-down managerial system that stifles thought and creativity. From this PAR experience, I have learned, investigated, and understood the perspectives of people

with little to no voice and have seen their issues from their position, equitably trying to make a difference with their help. This experience with my CPRs has made me a better leader and has helped me to find ways to encourage people to discuss their problems. Interviews and coding those interviews, journey lines and how participants perceive an issue by drawing their journey lines and labeling events, and drawings and Photovoice have been tools to help people express a problem they happen to have. My experience in this PAR has made me realize that I need to continue to change and adapt as a leader, so I can make decisions in the most equitable way possible.

The Value of Research as Support

As a leader, I have always thought it is essential to listen to what people have to say, but this PAR project represents the first time I have researched issues to see whether there is educational research to support opinions and concerns. As I continue to develop as a leader, it is important not to lose this interest in keeping track of research in the educational field since I will encounter numerous, unfamiliar challenges. As my teaching mentor told me years ago, “Don’t go reinventing the wheel; someone else has already done this” (L. Britton, personal communication, August, 2000).

In summary, I have written about how this research has changed me as a leader. Prior to starting my EdD I did not see myself as a leader since I do not hold an official leadership position at the ISB, but as Grubb and Tredway (2010) said, “Leadership is already distributed in every school, even if its governance structure does not recognize that” (p. 39). Teacher-leaders can and should take heart in their closeness to the classroom and in schools as a key data point in school decision-making, and they should take part in improving how school life is constructed for the benefit of students. Their roles in an organization mean they can take an advocacy role based on multiple metrics that actually can impact the ways that fellow teachers and administrators think about students. Through our investigation, I have

realized the leadership impact I have on the science department. The high school science head of department has implemented my ideas of opening up the initial science course selection for ninth graders as they begin high school, the department uses interviews now to discuss formative comments on major writing assignments, and some teachers are using exit interviews as a way to better predict IB Diploma scores. I was able to use the data from this PAR project to show the Curriculum Office that teachers between the two schools need time to discuss what they are teaching and how students are experiencing the transition from middle school to high school. This type of interaction has helped to better align teaching between middle school and high school and should make the academic transition easier in the future. By being a part of this research, I have realized how important this research is to future students who transition here at the ISB and in other international schools who may reference our results. This research has made me aware of the CHC culture and that of political elites and how these two factors contribute to the stressful environment students experience here academically at the ISB. In conclusion, I have also realized the importance of research in the educational field and that there are studies available to help with problems that a school may be experiencing.

Conclusion

This study sought to investigate the middle school to high school transition at the ISB and to understand whether this transition is equitable for students academically and social-emotionally. The FoP aim was: To improve the academic and social-emotional transition from middle school to high school by creating a collaborative research team to collect and analyze student data and recommend policies, procedures, and rituals for the transition from middle school to high school at the ISB. The CPR team and I intended to uncover those complexities and support the school in its efforts to revisit the current system and improve the transition practice to reduce the stress of the passage between middle school and high school.

As such, I documented and analyzed this transition at the ISB through the experiences of 12 students from the class of 2021; four co-practitioner researchers and I worked in collaboration with the 12 students who were from American, Thai, Japanese, and Korean communities as they transitioned to and experienced ninth and tenth grades at the ISB. Seeing this transition from students' perspectives helped me understand how the current the ISB transitional process can be improved. As a result, I was able to share the findings of this project to the high school principal, high school Dean of Students, high school Dean of Academics, high school Activities Coordinator, high school counselors, high school teachers, the middle school principal, and the middle school counselors.

During the time of this study, several changes took place to ease the transition at the ISB that were either a direct or indirect result of this research. In high school science, changes were made to the assessment policy to reduce the total number of independent research projects in grades nine and ten and to diversify major assessment types in all the introductory sciences. Changes to the schedule in science occurred so that Chemistry 1 was not mandatory for all in-coming freshman to high school. Alignment of the high school and middle school curriculum happened during the time of this study, and through my feedback on the science curriculum committee, I was able to influence change by suggesting that teachers needed time to meet between divisions to better communicate.

As a result of my Community Learning Exchange (CLE), the teachers that attended have reduced the amount of homework that they give for their students. The middle school principal as a result of his participation in my CLE has set a goal of adding ways that middle school teachers can build relationships with students. He is also looking at ways to equip students with more understanding of stress and pressure better and is encouraging his staff to teach coping strategies. The eighth-grade counselor is looking at ways in which she can reach

out to the parents in the middle school community to better educate them on the stressors in the transition to high school.

The three PAR cycles resulted in early indicators (Cycle 1), emergent themes (Cycle 2), and findings (Cycle 3). This empirical study provided findings that could then be represented as a framework. The framework highlighted the primary stressors in the transition: increased academic demands, grades/GPA, time management and finding a balance between academic work and activities, social pressures, teacher-student relationships, university planning, and internal pressure to succeed. The findings in this study were consistent with much of the literature that I discussed in Chapter 2.

In the end, this study allowed me to investigate a problematic issue deeply. Additionally, the project allowed me to grow as a learner by revisiting the social-emotional and physiological changes my students encountered during this transition. It also allowed me to understand the complexities involved with change in large international schools and the importance of politics in academic decisions. I also grew as a teacher by recognizing the importance of developing relationships with my students as opposed to being just an instructor. I also grew as a leader by understanding the importance of listening to my peers and giving a voice to the students over problems that concern them.

In this research, I created conditions where I listened to the voice of the students in this study and brought their experiences forward. I learned that student voice matters, and it is powerful. Teaching is an occupation where students surround educators but rarely do teachers seek advice from the students. I did, and it was a powerful experience which helped to create transition improvements in a school where change is slow. Most importantly, the project engaged students in uncovering and resolving an important issue. The students in this CPR became the primary drivers in the transition policy changes in the school. The results of this

work have been shared with the high school teachers along with the middle school and high school administrators at the ISB and led to early indications of policy and practice changes.

I began this project trying to understand what fostered and inhibited the transition between middle and high school at the ISB. I ended the project not only with a better understanding of what makes the transition from middle school to high school at the ISB difficult but was also a clear understanding of the importance of providing a voice for the students to implement changes to ease this transition. Students' voices are not only important in the classroom to maximize learning, but they are also critical in the decision-making process. Alfie Kohn (n.d.) once said "Children, after all, are not just adults-in-the-making. They are people whose current needs and rights and experiences must be taken seriously". Ultimately, it is the students who are the recipients of all significant decisions in a school, so it is only natural that they should have a say in decisions that affect them. The importance of the students' voices when implementing change in a school was my ultimate take away as a leader from this project.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284 ·
www.ecu.edu/ORIC/irb

Notification of Continuing Review Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [James Welch](#)
CC: [Matthew Militello](#)
Date: 7/31/2018
Re: [CR00007078](#)
[UMCIRB 17-001479](#)
Moving From the Middle: An Exploration of Student Experiences Transitioning to High School in International Settings.

The continuing review of your expedited study was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 7/30/2018 to 7/29/2019. This research study is eligible for review under expedited category #7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Document	Description
Adult Consent Form Welch.docx(0.02)	Consent Forms
Initial Survey(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires
Interview Questions(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Interview Questions for Counselors(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Student Assent Form(0.01)	Consent Forms
Student Consent Form Welch 2.docx(0.02)	Consent Forms
Welch Proposal(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

Study Identification Information

This is the first step in your Human Research Application. You will automatically be guided to the appropriate page views needed to complete your submission. If a question is not applicable to your study, you may state this as your response. Please read the help text located on the right side of the page throughout this application.

1.0 * Study Name (Short):

Moving From the Middle: An Exploration of Student Experiences Transitioning to High School in International Settings.

2.0 Study Name (Long):

A Three Cycle Participatory Action Research Project Investigating Transnational Student Transitions from Eighth Grade to High School and the Psychological and Socio-Cultural Aspects that Affect this Transition.

3.0 * Summary of Research in Lay Terms:

The purpose of this study is to understand why the transition from middle school to high school is challenging for students at the International School Bangkok and to co-construct recommendations for new systems and processes to mitigate challenges that have been identified. During the planning stage of the action research, I identified and recruited and gained permission from thirteen middle school students who were in eighth grade at the beginning of this study. I intend to follow this group of students through eighth grade and into ninth grade and document and analyze these students and their transition experiences. Three high school counselors will also be a part of my CPR.

4.0 * Principal Investigator:

James Welch

5.0 Faculty Investigator (Serving as the responsible individual in the oversight of the research study when the PI is a student, resident, fellow or visiting faculty.)

[Matthew Militelo](#)

Faculty Investigator IRB Certification Renewal Deadline: 8/24/2020

6.0 Study Coordinator or Contact Individual:

7.0 Contact Individual(s) (if different from Study Coordinator or Principal Investigator):

Last Name First Name Organization Profile IRB Certification Renewal Deadline

There are no items to display

8.0 Sub-Investigators:

Last Name First Name Organization Profile IRB Certification Renewal Deadline

9.0

Other Study Staff - (Read-Only):

Last Name First Name Organization Profile IRB Certification Renewal Deadline

There are no items to display

APPENDIX B: INITIAL TRANSITION SURVEY

Moving From the Middle: An Exploration of Student Experiences Transitioning to High School in International Settings

Introduction

Thank you for taking time from your busy schedules to meet with me today. I appreciate your willingness to participate in this focus group survey and will limit the time to ten minutes.

My name is James R. Welch. I am conducting research as a graduate student at East Carolina University. This survey is for me to get an understanding of the cultural make-up of the eighth-grade class and to see what stressors students are worried about when they reach ninth grade.

Disclosures:

- Your participation in the study is voluntary. It is your decision whether or not to participate and you may elect to stop participating in the survey at any time.
- The survey will be digitally recorded. All information collected will be kept confidential. Any information collected during the session that may identify any participant will only be disclosed with your prior permission. A coding system will be used in the management and analysis of the focus group data with no names or school identifiers associated with any of the recorded discussion.
- The survey time will last ten minutes.

Survey Questions

Focus Group:

Please open your computer to the link that has been provided and fill out the survey. The survey questions are as follows:

Question #1—What is your nationality? If you have more than one nationality, then state the one you identify with the most.

Question #2—Are you male or female?

Question #3—How many more years do you think you will remain at the ISB?

- a.) 0—I will leave after eighth grade
- b.) 1—I will leave after ninth grade
- c.) 2—I will leave after tenth grade
- d.) 3—I will leave after eleventh grade
- e.) 4—I will graduate from the ISB

Question #4—How concerned are you about the transition to high school?

- a.) Not at all—I feel prepared
- b.) Somewhat concerned
- c.) Very concerned

Question #5—Do you feel prepared academically for the transition to high school?

- a.) Yes
- b.) No
- c.) Maybe/unsure

Questions #6—What do you think will cause you the most stress next year when you are in ninth grade?

- a.) Academic classes
- b.) Making new friends
- c.) Finding your classes
- d.) Being in a new environment
- e.) Different grading system
- f.) Longer classes
- g.) Homework
- h.) Parental pressure
- i.) Other

Question #7—Would you be interested in being a part of an academic study to improve the transition from middle school to high school at the ISB? (This would take about 30 minutes of your time each year)

- a.) Yes
- b.) No
- c.) Maybe—I need more information

APPENDIX C: STUDENT AND CLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

PAR CYCLE 1—PAR CYCLE 3

Moving From the Middle: An Exploration of Student Experiences Transitioning to High School in International Settings.

Introduction

Thank you for taking time from your busy schedules to meet with me today. I appreciate your willingness to participate in this focus group interview and will limit the time to one hour.

My name is James R. Welch. I will serve as the moderator for the interview with assistance from Wendy Herbert who will record notes. I am conducting research as a graduate student at East Carolina University. The interview is part of a study to understand the psychological and socio-cultural transition that students encounter as they transition from middle school to high school at ISB.

Disclosures:

- Your participation in the study is voluntary. It is your decision whether or not to participate and you may elect to stop participating in the interview at any time.
- The interview will be digitally recorded in order to capture a comprehensive record of our conversation. All information collected will be kept confidential. Any information collected during the session that may identify any participant will only be disclosed with your prior permission. A coding system will be used in the management and analysis of the focus group data with no names or school identifiers associated with any of the recorded discussion.
- The interview will last approximately one hour.

Interview Questions

TURN RECORDER ON AND STATE THE FOLLOWING:

“This is (*Your Name*), interviewing (*School Name*) on (*Date*) for the Transnational Psychological and Socio-Cultural Transition from Middle School to High School.

Focus Group:

To begin the conversation, please introduce yourself, how old you are, where you are from, and what other schools you have attended and describe your role as a CPR in our study. Start with first person to the right and continue left till all participants have introduced themselves.

Biographical Sketch The most important part of our co-research together with our group is me getting to know you better as an individual. To start with, I need you to answer the questions below. Your writing should give me a well-rounded picture of who you are as a student and as an individual. Please be honest and thorough with your answers.
First and Last Name
How old are you?
Where are you from?
What schools have you attended other than ISB?
Have you received any honors or awards since you have been in school? Please describe the awards or honors you have received.
Are you involved in any sports or activities? Please list them and how long you have been involved in years.
What went well and what did not go well when you transitioned from elementary school into middle school?
What transitions went well when you first arrived at ISB and what did not go well?
Transition Questions
What three things has ISB done to help you with your Eighth grade to high school?
What one thing would you have liked ISB to have done this year to help you with the transition to high school?
What personal expectations have you placed on yourself for next year academically?
What expectations do your parents have for you next year academically?
What three things do you think you will miss about middle school?
What three things are you looking forward to about high school?
What course or subject are you most nervous about taking next year and why?
What three things do you think will be the most challenging about transitioning to high school?
Do you think this transition will be easier or more difficult than your transition from elementary school to middle school? Elaborate.

Student CPR Initial Interview Questions for the Middle School to High School Transition

August 2017 PAR Cycle 1

Please state your name
After two weeks of high school, how has the transition been so far?
What is the biggest difference between middle school and high school?
What is the biggest difference between middle school and high school teachers?
Is there a particular class you have found difficult so far? Explain why this course is difficult compared the middle school equivalent of this course.
Is there anything you feel that has helped you with the transition to high school?
Thinking of your friends who are of the same nationality, what have your friends found difficult about the transition?

Transition Interview Questions for the Students in the CPR Group in November 2017 PAR

Cycle 1

Please draw a picture of what you have found challenging about the MS to HS transition.
Explain why this drawing represents the most stressful aspect of the middle school to high school transition at ISB.
What has changed since our last meeting regarding the middle school to high school transition?
What two things have you found useful about Advisory this year in regard to adjusting to high school?
What two things have you found useful about Freshman Seminar regarding the adjustment to high school?
Knowing what you know now, what would you change about your eighth-grade experience and first week of ninth grade to better prepare you for the high school transition?
What would you say is the second biggest challenge you have faced with the middle school to high school transition at ISB?

Initial Questions for Photo Analysis in PAR Cycle 2 January 2017

When you look at these photos, what do you observe?
When you look at these photos, what themes do you see?
Are there any photos that are surprising to you?

Follow Up Questions: Reaching Consensus PAR Cycle 2

What has been surprising, both good and bad, about the transition from middle school to high school?
When you think of other ninth graders in your nationality, what do they mention as the biggest stressors in the transition from middle school to high school at the ISB?
Do you feel any social pressure about achieving good grades at the ISB?
In terms of after school activities and sports, how are you able to find a balance between being active and your school work?
Do you feel teachers communicate with one another about student workload and assessment dates?

CLE Survey Questions from September 20, 2018 PAR Cycle 3

Using the Journey Line you created, explain what you feel are the biggest stressors in tenth grade.

What do you feel are the main differences between the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade and the transition from ninth grade to tenth grade?

What did you learn from this session? Please be as specific and honest as possible.

What might you do differently as a teacher/counselor/administrator after this presentation? (Transfer of practice)

May I contact you if I have follow-up questions?

APPENDIX D: COUNSELOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS PAR CYCLE 1

Moving From the Middle: An Exploration of Student Experiences Transitioning to High School in International Settings.

Introduction

Thank you for taking time from your busy schedules to meet with me today. I appreciate your willingness to participate in this focus group interview and will limit the time to one hour.

My name is James R. Welch. I will serve as the moderator for the interview with assistance from Wendy Herbert who will record notes. I am conducting research as a graduate student at East Carolina University. The interview is part of a study to understand the psychological and socio-cultural transition that students encounter as they transition from middle school to high school at ISB.

Disclosures:

- Your participation in the study is voluntary. It is your decision whether or not to participate and you may elect to stop participating in the interview at any time.
- The interview will be digitally recorded in order to capture a comprehensive record of our conversation. All information collected will be kept confidential. Any information collected during the session that may identify any participant will only be disclosed with your prior permission. A coding system will be used in the management and analysis of the focus group data with no names or school identifiers associated with any of the recorded discussion.
- The interview will last approximately one hour.

Interview Questions

TURN RECORDER ON AND STATE THE FOLLOWING:

“This is (*Your Name*), interviewing (*School Name*) on (*Date*) for the Transnational Psychological and Socio-Cultural Transition from Middle School to High School.

Focus Group:

To begin the conversation, please introduce yourself by stating where you are from, how long you have worked at ISB, how long you have been a counselor, where and what capacity have you worked as a counselor and describe your role as a CPR in our study. Start with first person to the right and continue left till all three participants have introduced themselves.

Transition Interview Questions for the High School Counselors in the CPR Group

From your experience this year as a counselor, draw a picture of what you feel the current ninth-graders are struggling with the most regarding the transition from middle school to high school and explain why this is your drawing.
As a counselor, draw how or where you fit in with this drawing.
What are the assets and challenges that students have in this MS to HS transition at ISB?
Have you noticed any transition themes in particular about the transition and the following nationalities: American, Thai, Korean, Japanese?
Any final transition thoughts?

Question #1—In your experience here at ISB, do you see common themes that students approach you about regarding the difficulty in this transition? If so, what would be the three most common themes?

Question #2—What do you feel are the three strengths to the ISB middle school to high school transition at the moment?

Question #3—What three areas do you feel need to be addressed to ease the transition from middle school to high school at ISB?

Question #4—What three cultural aspects do you feel make this middle school to high school transition difficult for American students?

Question #5—From your experience here at ISB, are there particular subjects that students struggle with when they transition from middle school to high school?

Questions #6—What three cultural aspects do you feel make this middle school to high school transition difficult for Thai students?

Question #7—What three cultural aspects do you feel make this middle school to high school transition difficult for Japanese students?

Question #8—What three cultural aspects do you feel make this middle school to high school transition difficult for Korean students?

Question #9—Do you see differences in the difficulty of the transition here at ISB compared to the other schools you have worked in?

Question #10 - What similarities do you see in the middle school to high school transition compared to other schools you have worked in?

Question #11—How do you plan to work as a team of counselors to assist students with their transitional needs this year?

Question #12—What changes to the transition process do you feel will be beneficial this year to students and why?

APPENDIX E: ADULT CONSENT FORM

*East Carolina
University*



Informed Consent to Participate in Research Information to Consider Before Taking Part in Research That Has No More Than Minimal Risk

Title of Research Study: Moving From the Middle: An Exploration of Student Experiences Transitioning to High School in International Settings.

Principal Investigator: James Ronald Welch under the guidance of Dr. Matthew Militello
Dr. Militello: Institution, Department or Division: College of Education
Address: 220 Ragsdale, ECU, Greenville, NC 27858
Telephone #: (919) 518.4008

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

The purpose of this research is to better understand how transnational students handle the psychological and socio-cultural transition from middle school to high school at the ISB. As a counselor in the school, you have a unique perspective on this transition and will be able to give feedback on how you see the students transitioning and you will be an excellent resource for data collection. By doing this research, we hope to learn how transnational students at the ISB experience the cognitive and affective transition from middle school to high school.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?

There are no known reasons for why you should not participate in this research study.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?

You can choose not to participate.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?

The research will be conducted at your school. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is approximately 5 hours.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to participate in one or more surveys, interviews and focus groups. Interviews and focus groups will be audio/video recorded. If you want to participate in an interview but do not want to be audio recorded, the interviewer will turn off the audio recorder. If you want to participate in a focus group but do not want to be video recorded, you will be able to sit out of field of view of the video camera and still be audio recorded. Survey, interview, and focus group questions will focus on the leadership of teaching and learning as it relates to computational thinking and computer science in the classroom.

What might I experience if I take part in the research?

We do not know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We do not know whether you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you, but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?

We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Will it cost me to take part in this research?

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?

ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:

- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates human research. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the North Carolina Department of Health, and the Office for Human Research Protections.
- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?

The information in the study will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the data collection and data analysis process. Consent forms and data from surveys, interviews, and focus groups will be maintained in a secure, locked location and will be stored for a minimum of three years after completion of the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

What if I decide I do not want to continue in this research?

You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator James Ronald Welch at +66 9 4913 9174 (Monday—Friday, between 4:00 pm—9:00 pm) or by e-mail: jamesw@isb.ac.th.

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the Office of Research Integrity & Compliance (ORIC) at phone number 252-744-2941 (days, 8:00 am—5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of the ORIC at 252-744-1971.

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

Participant's Name (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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APPENDIX F: CHILD CONSENT FORM



University

Parental/Legal Guardian Permission to Allow Your Child to Take Part in Research

Information to consider before allowing your child to take part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: Moving From the Middle: An Exploration of Student Experiences Transitioning to High School in International Settings.

Principal Investigator: James R. Welch
Institution, Department or Division: College of Education
Address: 39/7 Soi Nichada Thani, Samakee Road, Pakkret, Thailand
Telephone #: +66 9 4913 9174
Dissertation Advisor: Matthew Militello, Ph.D.
Telephone #: 1 (919) 518.4008

Participant Full Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____
Please **PRINT** clearly

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

Why is my child being invited to take part in this research?

The purpose of this research is to better understand how students handle the transition from middle school to high school at the ISB. Your child is being invited to take part in this research because they have indicated in a survey that they will be at the ISB next year and have expressed interest in being a part of this investigation. By doing this research, we hope to learn how transnational students at the ISB experience the cognitive and affective transition from middle school to high school.

If you and your child agree for him/her to volunteer for this research, your child will be one of about 12 people to do so.

Are there reasons my child should not take part in this research?

There are no known reasons for why your child should not participate in this research study. In addition, there are no known risks to participating in this transition study.

What other choices do I have if my child does not take part in this research?

Your child can choose not to participate.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?

The research will be conducted at the International School Bangkok and will consist of taking surveys on their experience with the transition and meeting with me twice a year to discuss their transition. Your child will need to come to room 3-212 twice during their ninth-grade year for these interviews. The total amount of time your child will be asked to volunteer for this study is about one hour a year this year and next.

What will my child be asked to do?

Your child will be asked to do the following:

- I will ask your child to write a short paragraph explaining where they are from.
- In our initial meeting I will need your child to write a Journey line outlining their educational experiences; focusing primarily on academic transitions they have encountered.
- I will interview your child about their feelings on the transition to ninth grade based upon the transitions they have experienced in the past.
- I will ask your child to elaborate on parental and cultural expectations related to their transition to high school.
- I will ask your child to fill out a climate survey to monitor how they are adapting to the transition.
- Your child's responses may be audio recorded. There will be no visual evidence to identify your child and the recording will be destroyed as soon as I have verified the content of our interview. Your child can opt out of these recordings at any time if they are not comfortable being recorded.

What might I experience if I take part in the research?

We do not know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We do not know whether you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you, but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

Will my child be paid for taking part in this research?

We will not be able to pay you or your child for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Will it cost me anything for my child to take part in this research?

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?

ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that your child took part in this research and may see information about your child that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your child's private information to do this research:

- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your child's welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify your child.

APPENDIX G: SITE APPROVAL LETTER



May 25, 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

The International School Bangkok recognizes the benefits of participating in relevant, well-designed research studies proposed by qualified individuals. Approval for conducting such studies is based primarily on the extent to which substantial benefits can be shown for the International School Bangkok and its mission of educating students. The purpose of this letter is to notify you of the **approval** to conduct your dissertation study titled, *"An Action Research Study of Transnational Students and their Academic and Social-Emotional Transition from Middle School to High School at a Large International School"* with participants in our school.

The project meets all of our school guidelines, procedures, and safeguards for conducting research on our campus. Moreover, there is ample space for James Ronald Welch to conduct his study and his project will not interfere with any functions of the International School Bangkok. Finally, the following conditions must be met, as agreed upon by the researchers and the International School Bangkok:

- Participant data only includes information captured from the stated data collection strategies.
- Participation is voluntary.
- Participants can choose to leave the study without penalty at any time.
- Any issues with participation in the study are reported to the school administration in a timely manner.
- An executive summary of your findings is shared with the school administration once the study is complete.

In addition to these conditions, the study must follow all of the East Carolina University IRB guidelines.

We are excited to support this important work.

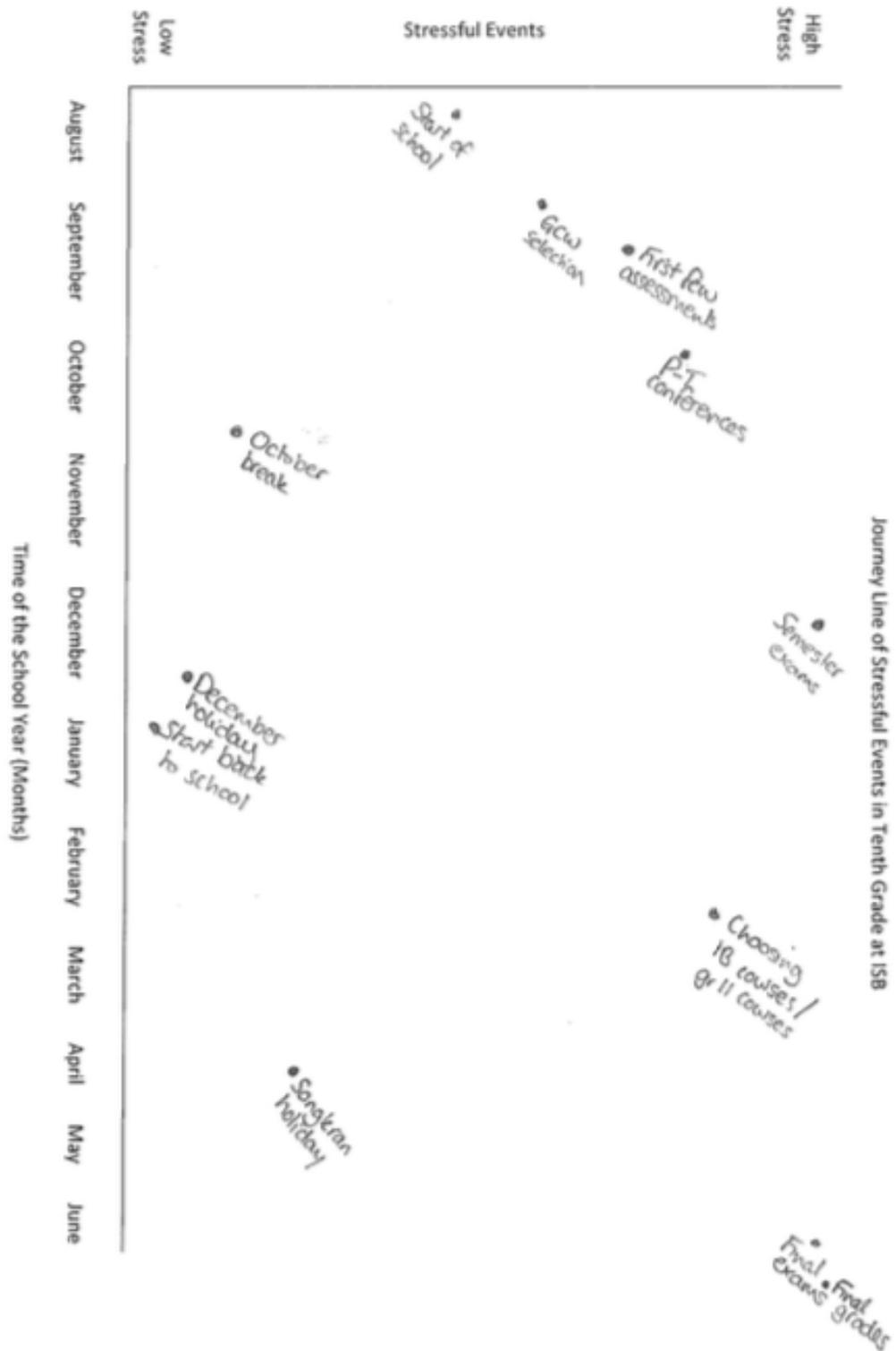
Respectfully,

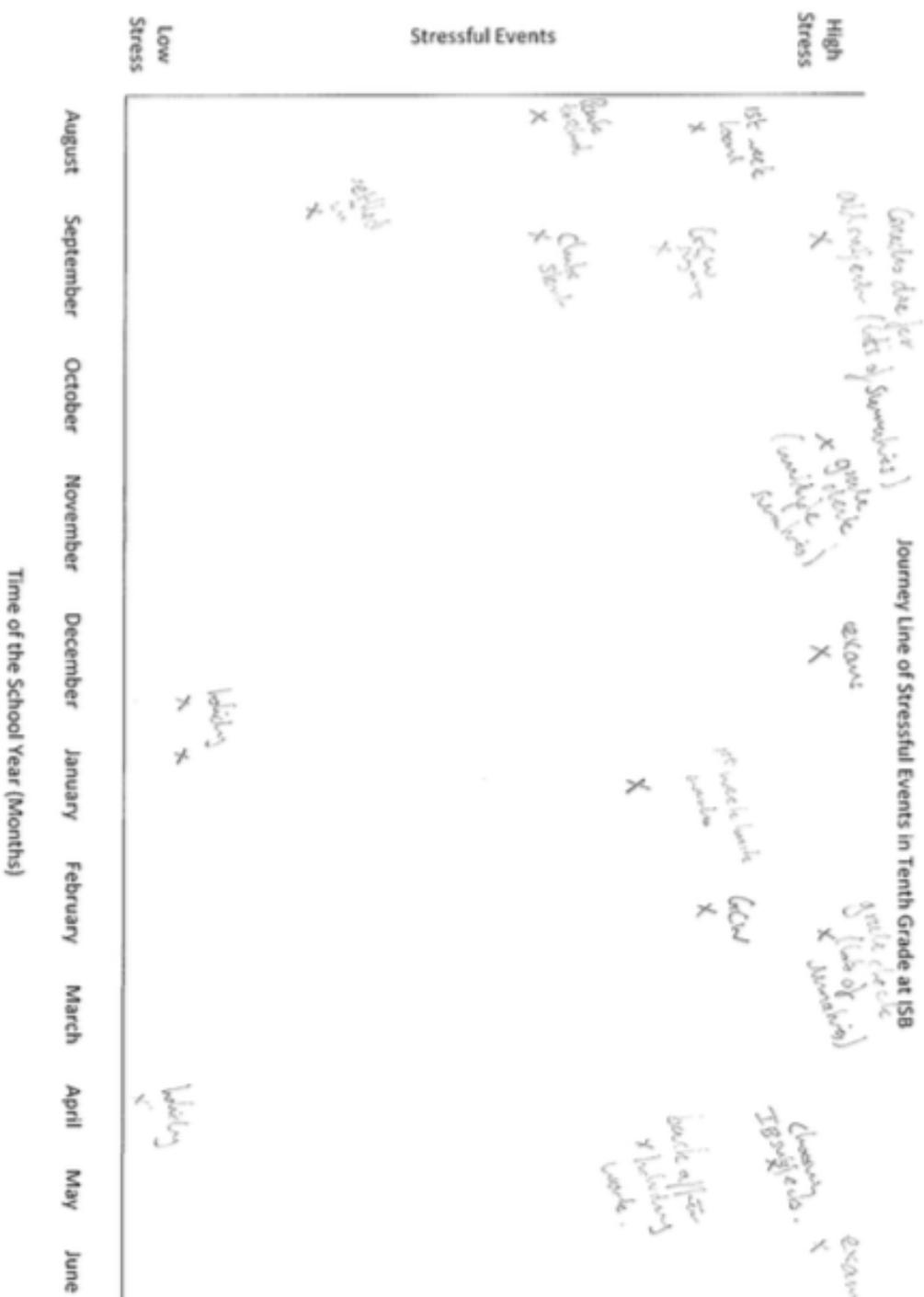
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Davies', is written over a light blue circular stamp.

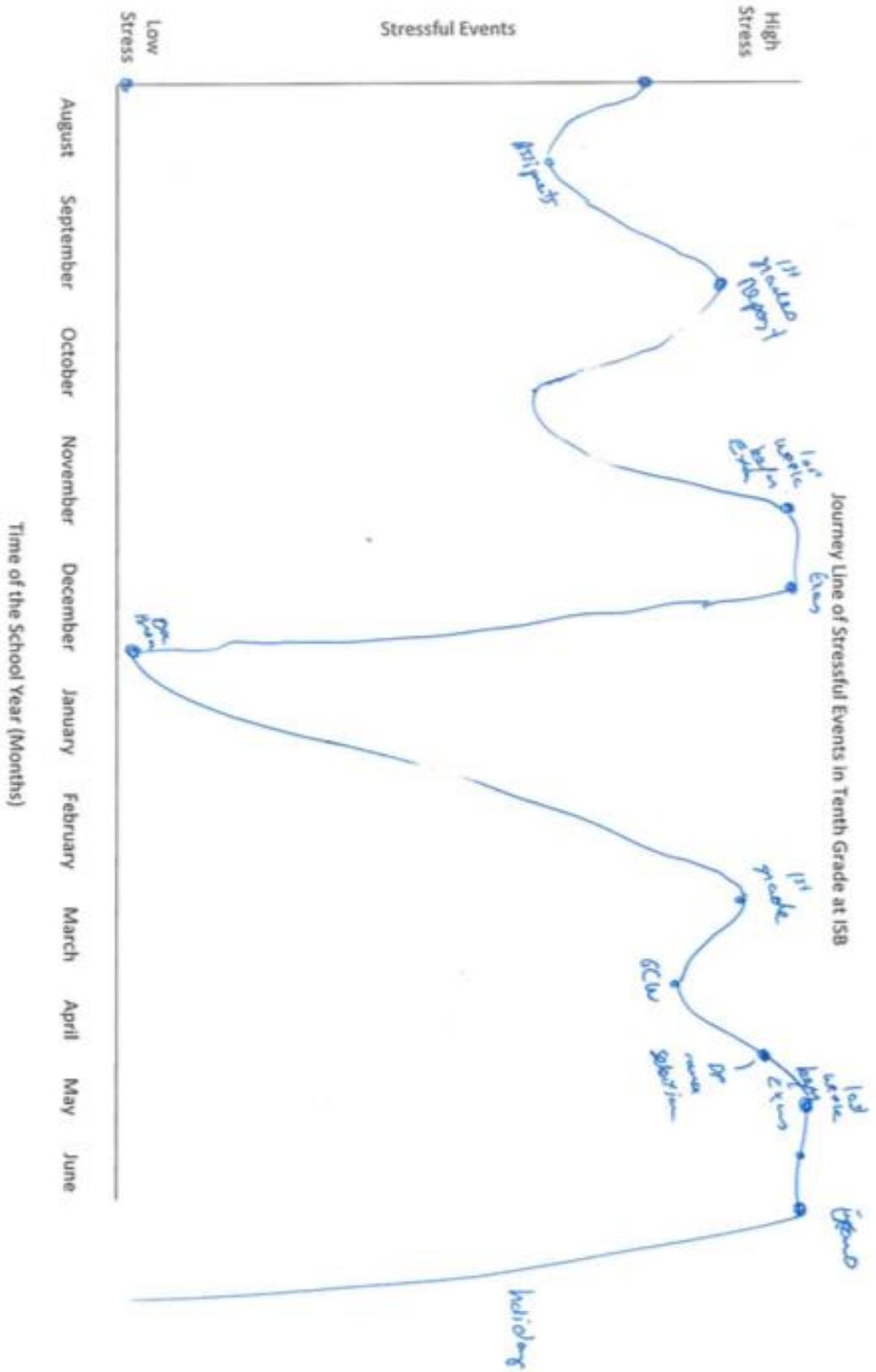
Dr. Andrew Davies
Head of School

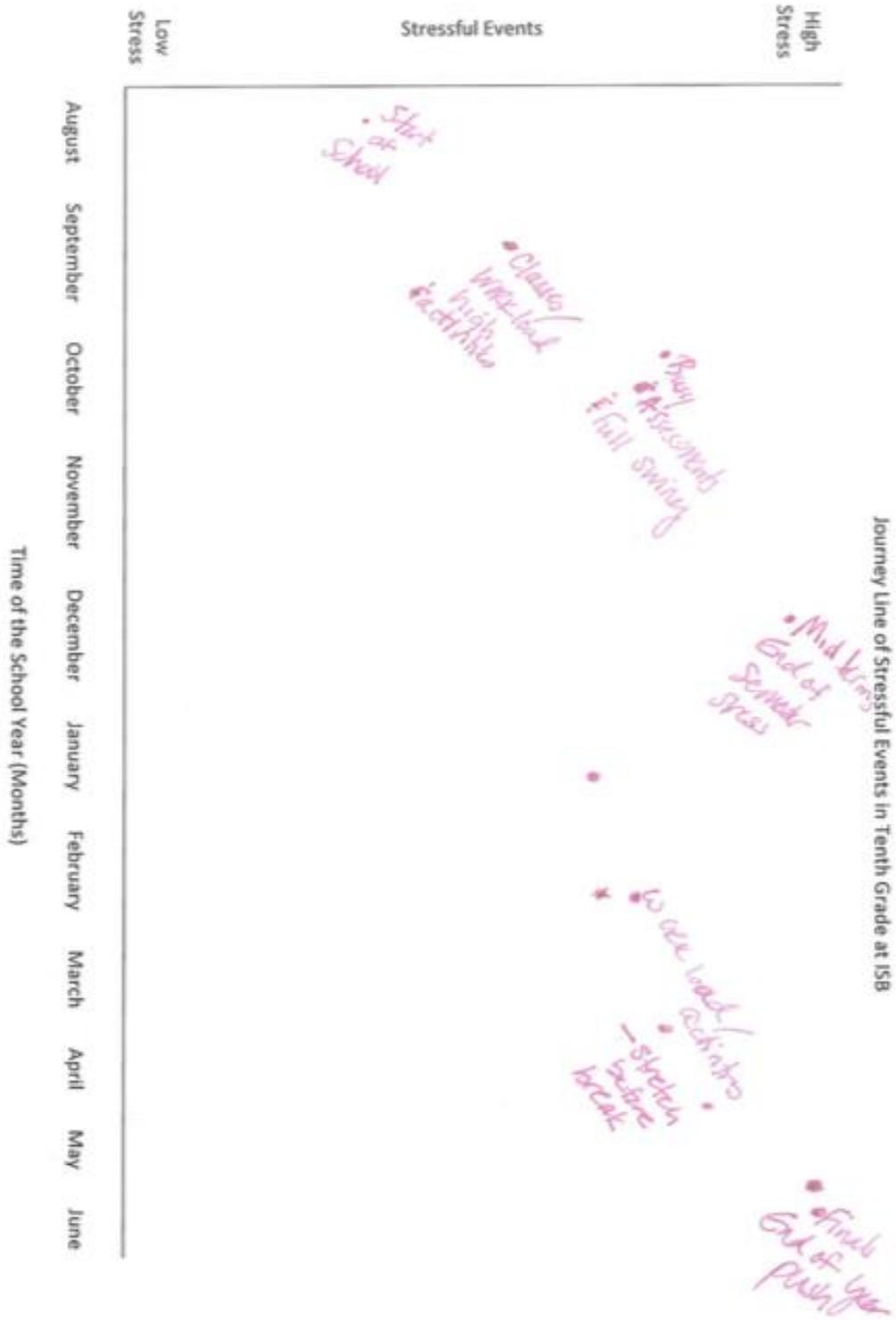


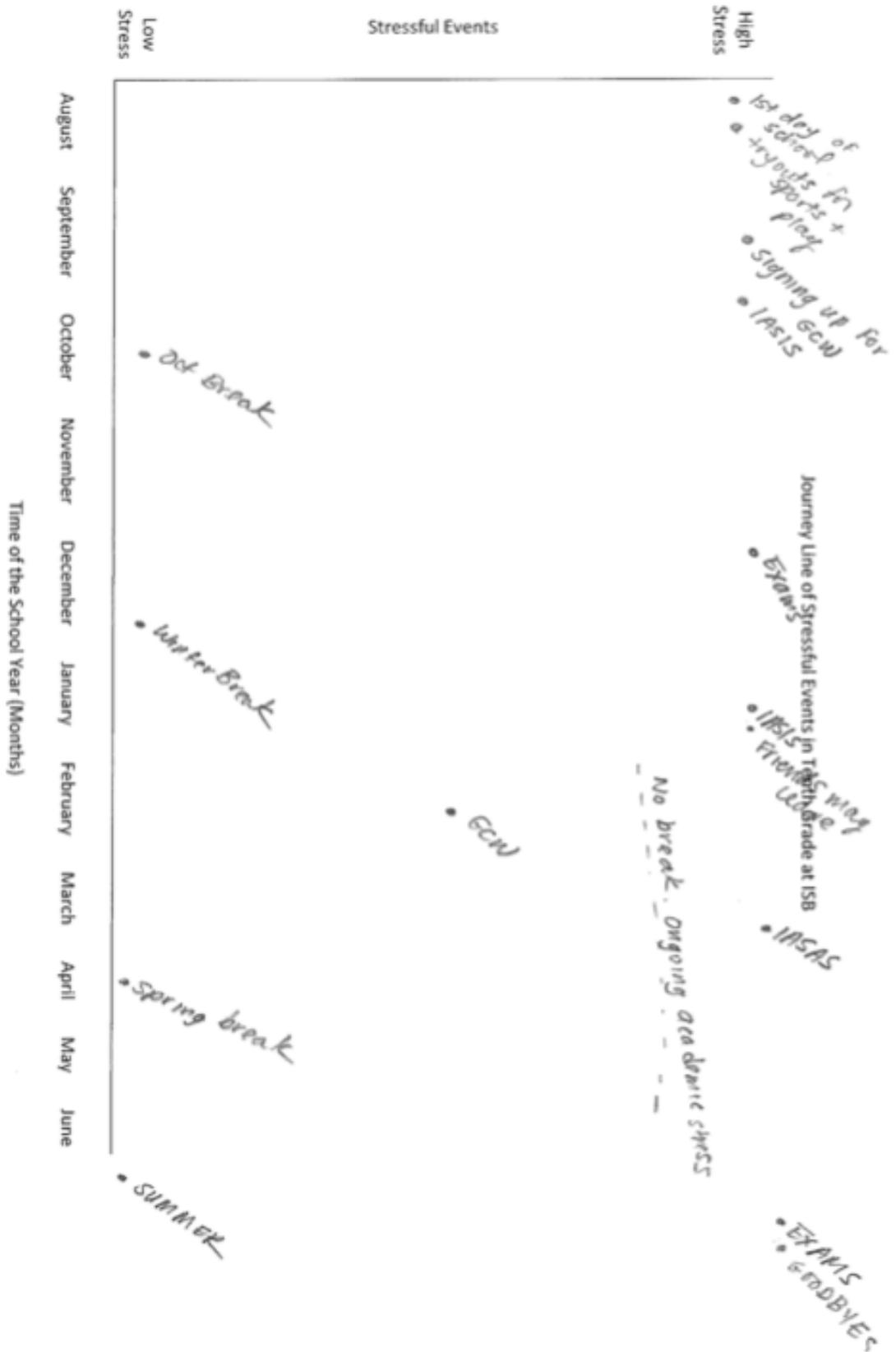
APPENDIX H: CLE PARTICIPANT JOURNEY LINES











Journey Line of Stressful Events in Tenth Grade at ISB

