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# **Change and Opportunity: The Transition from Primary to Secondary School in Rural and Urban Peru**

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**Patricia Ames  
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Available from:  
Young Lives  
Department of International Development  
University of Oxford  
3 Mansfield Road  
Oxford OX1 3TB, UK  
Tel: +44 (0)1865 281751  
E-mail: [younglives@younglives.org.uk](mailto:younglives@younglives.org.uk)  
Web: [www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk)

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# Abstract

This paper reports the expectations, concerns and experiences of Peruvian children from four contrasting districts during their transition from primary to secondary school. The children who participated in this study were aged 11 to 13 years old and were part of Young Lives, a longitudinal study of childhood poverty in four countries. They were visited in two consecutive years to capture different views before, during and after the transition process. Qualitative methods were used to elicit the views of children themselves, as well as those of their parents and teachers. The study found that children do identify a series of changes related to the different organisation and pedagogical approach in secondary schools: these are seen by children both as a difficult challenge in academic and social terms, but also as an opportunity to enjoy more freedom and autonomy and to grow up and progress in their educational careers. The study also highlights the importance of peer relationships as sources of academic and emotional support in making this transition. We argue that, to fully understand this transition, it is necessary to situate it within a particular discourse about the role of education in children's narratives, in order to contextualise this moment and its importance in relation to children's personal and family aims. The social and cultural meanings associated with education are related to a particular view of progress, upward mobility and modernisation, which involves becoming a professional and living in the city, and thus a major change in identity, especially for rural children. In this way, the research shows how the meanings associated with education sustain children's transition through the school system and their expectations for the future.

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# The Authors

**Patricia Ames** is an anthropologist with a PhD in Anthropology of Education from the University of London. She leads the Young Lives qualitative team in Peru. Currently she is a researcher at the *Instituto de Estudios Peruanos* (IEP) and teaches on the Anthropology masters degree course at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Peru. Her research has focused on rural education, addressing issues of power, gender inequalities, ethnicity and multigrade teaching in rural areas, as well as topics related to childhood, and literacy as social practice. In 2006 Patricia Ames was visiting professor at the Summer Institute in Language, Culture and Teaching in the Faculty of Graduate Studies at York University, Canada.

**Vanessa Rojas** has a BA in Anthropology and an MSc in Political Science, both from the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Peru. Her work has focused on anthropology of education. Currently, she is working as a research assistant on qualitative aspects of Young Lives research in Peru.

## About Young Lives

Young Lives is a 15-year longitudinal study of childhood poverty, based at the University of Oxford's Department of International Development, and directed by Dr Jo Boyden. Young Lives is core-funded from 2001 to 2017 by UK aid from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries, and co-funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2010 to 2014. Sub-studies are funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, the Inter-American Development Bank (in Peru), the International Development Research Centre (in Ethiopia), the Oak Foundation.

The views expressed are those of the author(s). They are not necessarily those of, or endorsed by, Young Lives, the University of Oxford, DFID or other funders.

# 1. Introduction

The transition from primary to secondary school is usually considered one of the most difficult processes in children's educational careers and can affect both their academic performance and their general sense of well-being (Zeedyk et al. 2003), not only in the present but also with longer-term consequences (West et al. 2010). Most research into the transition or transfer from primary to secondary school has been conducted in the US, Europe and Australia (West et al. 2010, Rice 2001; Zeedyk et al. 2003; Sirsch 2003; Howard and Johnson 2004) and is often concentrated in large urban areas (Johnstone 2002). Few studies look at the transition from primary to secondary school in developing countries or in rural areas. This may be due to relatively low enrolment rates in secondary education in most developing countries. However, in Latin America, a region where most countries already achieved universal primary education, the increase of enrolment in secondary education make the transition to secondary school a more widely shared experience than before. That is the case of Peru, a South American country that reached almost universal primary education in the 1990s (ONU-PCM 2009). At the beginning of the 1990s about half of the 12- to 16-year-old population (58.9 per cent) was enrolled in secondary school in Peru (Guadalupe et al. 2002), but by 2007 about three-quarters (74.6 per cent) was enrolled (MED 2008). However, enrolment in secondary education is still not universal, and reveals important inequalities related to location, poverty levels and ethnicity.

Researching children's transitions to secondary school in a majority world country context like Peru may provide new insights in the literature about transitions. For example, it is also highly likely that a significant number of pupils from these countries are the first generation to access secondary education, which may imply an opportunity to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty. However, they will also face a set of challenges to overcome in their educational trajectories due to the lack of familiarity with the culture valued within school systems (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). Studying children's accounts of this turning point in their lives may contribute to a better understanding of their life trajectories, the educational challenges of their societies and also the cultural resources that sustain their educational transitions.

The data gathered by Young Lives in Peru allows for in-depth exploration of these issues. Young Lives is a 15-year longitudinal study of childhood poverty in Ethiopia, India (in the state of Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam. Two cohorts in each country are being studied in detail. These comprise 2,000 children born in 2000/1 (the Younger Cohort) and 1,000 children born in 1994/5 (the Older Cohort). These cohorts were first studied through surveys in 2002, 2006/7 and 2009, with plans to carry out further rounds of data collection through to 2015. In-depth qualitative research was conducted in two rounds in 2007 and 2008 with a subsample of children from both cohorts, with further rounds planned for 2011 and 2013.

This paper presents findings from the qualitative research in Peru, carried out in 2007 and 2008 on a subsample of 25 children from the Older Cohort – those at the age of making the transition from primary to secondary school.<sup>1</sup> The children come from four different and contrasting districts. Because various socioeconomic backgrounds, gender and ethnic characteristics as well as location and language are represented, this allows for exploration

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1 Only in one site (San Roman) we did a follow-up visit in 2009.

of different circumstances that children may experience when making the transition from primary to secondary school. The children's cases illustrate different trajectories but at the same time highlight common issues related to transition to secondary school as raised by the children themselves. In particular, the cases analysed show the importance education has in children's narratives, understood as a rhetorical device (Thomson et al 2002), as the stories that emerge from their oral accounts and give meaning to their experiences. Indeed, children's narratives put forward an image of education as central for both their present and future well-being, and also show this image is sustained by shared values and cultural views.

This introduction presents the analytical framework and the concepts guiding the study as well as the research participants and methodology. Section 2 presents a brief background of secondary education in Peru, the issues of access, equity and continuity that affect it, and a brief summary of the problems that recent studies have highlighted. Section 3 analyses children's experiences of transition from primary to secondary school, especially the commonalities found in the changes and challenges that they identify, and how they adapt to the new environment. Despite the many similarities found across sites, the children follow different paths when making their transition from primary to secondary school and this impacts on their experiences. We illustrate the differences and contrasts in Section 4 using examples from our case studies, and highlight the different trajectories that may emerge. In Section 5 we address the cultural values and aspirations that underpin children's and families' efforts to undertake educational careers as they emerged powerfully during the course of research. Finally, there is a summary and discussion, and some conclusions.

## **Well-being, transitions and trajectories: analytical framework**

Currently, the study of transition processes is considered to be central to an understanding of children's experiences and well-being. *Well-being* is a key concept in Young Lives research on childhood poverty, as it allows us to include subjective experiences and meanings and move from economic to multidimensional understandings of people's lives, a trend observable within international research on poverty (Camfield et al. 2009). Well-being has been the subject of special reflection in the last years by the WeD group - the Well-being in Development Countries Research Group at the University of Bath. Formed in 2003, the WeD group aimed to develop a conceptual and methodological framework for understanding the social and cultural construction of well-being in developing countries, and worked with four developing countries, including Peru. The WeD group provides the following overarching definition of well-being:

Well-being is defined here as a state of being with others in society where: a) people's basic needs are met, b) where they can act effectively and meaningfully in pursuit of their goals, and c) where they feel satisfied with their life.

(Copestake 2008:3)

Within Young Lives, well-being is considered a key notion for any study of children in poverty as it explores the objective, subjective, and inter-subjective dimensions of their experience in a holistic and contextual manner (Young Lives 2007). Well-being is also an integrative concept to combine diverse methodological approaches (Camfield et al. 2009). In addition, given the longitudinal nature of Young Lives research, the issues of time and change become especially important and intertwined with the evolving concept of well-being. This makes the concepts of transitions and trajectories particularly useful and centrally located in the broader framework for understanding children's lives. In this paper we focus on children's experiences at a key transition process they were undergoing when the qualitative research



took place and which may affect their current and future well-being: the transition from primary to secondary school.

One generic definition of *transition* is provided by Vogler et al. (2008:1) who define it as a key event and/or process 'occurring at specific periods or turning points during the life course'. Within anthropological literature, a close concept is that of rites of passage, introduced by Van Gennep (1960) and further developed by Turner (1995), which implies a change of status and a new set of characteristics and responsibilities by the person undergoing the rite of passage. Indeed, some authors have depicted the transition to secondary school as a modern rite of passage (Howard and Johnson 2004; Pratt and George 2005; Chedzoy and Burden 2005; Galton 2009).

Transitions therefore refer to diverse events: many are social in nature, but increasing attention is given to educational events, where change is a key feature. In this sense, transition from primary to secondary education is identified as a particularly critical moment of change because of the differences in curricular organisation, time, space and social relations between these two spaces (Gimeno Sacristan 1997; Levinson 2001, Howard and Johnson 2004, Zeedyk et al. 2003; Pratt and George 2005).

In most cases transition from primary to secondary school implies a physical transfer from one school to another, and even a move to another town, particularly in rural areas. Additionally, the simultaneity of these changes with the beginning of puberty and adolescence – which in some places also means the beginning of adult life – makes this process a particularly intense one.

There are thus not one but several ways to experience the transition to secondary school: while one child may attend a secondary school close to his or her home and with old primary school classmates, another may need to migrate in order to study, including moving to another household. Even if living in the same city, transferring to a secondary school may mean adapting to a whole new social context. In addition, experiences of transitions are affected by several other factors, such as gender, ethnicity, social background, poverty and location. The variety of cases considered in this study allow the illustration of how different factors and circumstances impact when making the transition, what they mean for children and how they shape different life trajectories.

The concept of *trajectories* refers not only to itineraries of entrance and exits to and from educational institutions but 'imply an experiential path and the appropriation of a set of practices produced within a dense framework of interventions' (Santillan 2007: 915). Trajectories then refer more generally to life-course paths people follows (Crivello 2009) and the structural positions and subjective dispositions that are created through such paths, and that in turn affect transitions (Davila and Ghiardo 2005). Transitions and trajectories can be seen then as paired concepts (Crivello 2009), as they are processes that can only be understood in their relationship and in their mutual interdependence (Davila and Ghiardo 2005).

## **Literature on transition from primary to secondary school**

Research on transition from primary to secondary school has concentrated on different aspects of this process, from pupil characteristics (insofar as they are associated with better or worse transitions) to institutional discontinuities (such as lack of continuity from primary to secondary school due to changes in curriculum, teaching styles and approaches to knowledge), from expectations versus actual experiences to educational outcomes, and how these factors interact. Rice (2001) for example, investigates to what extent institutional

discontinuities affect pupil progress in mathematics and science using a 5-year database for US schools. She found evidence that concerns about school safety, quality of the learning environment, teacher academic push<sup>2</sup>, and pupils' autonomy to select courses have a negative impact on pupil progress across the transition. A recent study by West et al. (2010) in Scotland, using a longitudinal database of 2,000 pupils, also looks at the transition experience and its impacts on pupils' attainment and well-being. In contrast with Rice, this study found that personal characteristics were much more important than institutional ones in accounting for different transitions experiences. For example, respondents with lower ability and lower self-esteem experienced poorer school transitions. Those who had been victimised, who showed more anxiety and who were less prepared experienced poor peer transitions. The authors identify two different aspects of transitions - social (peer) and institutional (school) - and their analysis looks at both. West et al. also found evidence of long-term effects of poorer transition experiences on selected indicators of well-being and attainment, as they followed respondents through different moments in time: at age 11 in primary school, at age 13 and 15 in secondary school, and at age 18-19.

Another important research strand has been the investigation of expectations and experiences before and after the transition, from classical studies such as the ethnography by Measor and Woods (1984) to more recent ones (Zeedyk et al. 2003; Sirsch 2003; Johnstone 2002; Howard and Johnson 2004; Chedzoy and Burden 2005; Pratt and George 2005). Such studies use either surveys or qualitative methods; some integrate both.

Zeedyk et al (2003), for example, conducted a survey among pupils, parents and teachers in nine primary schools in Scotland and England and one Scottish secondary school. They found that the main concerns for all groups were: bullying, fear of getting lost, increased workload and peer relationships. They also found similarities between primary school pupils and their parents. Chedzoy and Burden (2005) also used a questionnaire with five primary schools and five secondary schools in England. In this study pupils were surveyed in two consecutive years (the last year of primary and the first year of secondary) and the results compared to test if the children's concerns remained the same or if they changed. The concerns most often raised were the prospect of more difficult academic work and stricter teachers. However, most pupils also looked forward to making new friendships and anticipated that the new school would be a friendly place. When they were interviewed the following year, the aspects they had most enjoyed at secondary school were the new lessons and subjects, making new friends and the new teachers. Most of the concerns expressed the previous year had been managed after only a short period of time.

Sirsch (2003) also used a survey with pupils in the last year of primary education in 23 schools in Vienna to investigate their attitudes to the transition from primary to secondary school in terms of perception of challenge or threat. He found both social and academic challenges and a predominantly positive attitude to the sense of a challenge. The perception of threat was diminished when pupils had the opportunity to visit the new school before making the transition.

There are also qualitative studies investigating the transition to secondary school, such as Johnstone (2002) and Howard and Johnson (2004) in Australia, both of whom worked with children in the last year of primary school and the first year of secondary school. Johnstone (2002) used interviews, journal keeping and questionnaire data with 13 pupils in rural

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2 Measured by the degree of agreement with the following statement: 'The teachers in this school push students pretty hard in their academic subjects' (Rice 2001: 395).

schools. The pupils' main concerns were related to the organisational and social aspects of the transition process, but the author also stressed the variety among pupils' concerns and the individual aspects of the transition experience. She found both fear and nervousness but also excitement about the transition process. The study by Howard and Johnson (2004) was conducted across two sites (one urban, one rural) and used semi-structured interviews with pupils (25 in primary school and 68 in secondary school), teachers (10) and parents (21). The main challenges of the transition for children in this study were related to making new friends, fitting in, dealing with bullying, and keeping up with the academic work (note the first three refer to social aspects of the transition while the last one relates to its academic demands). Some other practical issues were also the size and complexity of secondary school, and thus the fear of getting lost, arriving late for class, and the confusion of moving around between classes. Despite these challenges, children felt positive about the move from primary to secondary school and saw the latter as "more important".

A qualitative study in England by Pratt and George (2005), also using semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, was conducted to investigate pupils' concerns regarding their attitudes to friendship during transition to secondary school. They researched 30 pupils in the last year of primary school, who were then followed in the first year of secondary school. The findings show that for children the aspect of greater significance in their transition to secondary school was the issue of friendship and peer group membership, even though other changes, such as size and layout of buildings, greater number of teachers and pupils and curriculum diversity, were identified, confirming what had been suggested by previous ethnographic work (Mearns and Woods 1984).

The importance of peer relations is also featured in the ethnographic study by Martínez and Quiroz (2007) in a public secondary school in Mexico. From the interviews conducted with 34 pupils, the issue of staying with friends from primary school is such a powerful reason to choose a particular secondary school that it even exceeds the prestige or quality of the school itself. So although the secondary school in which the study took place had a bad reputation, pupils preferred it in order to remain with their friends. This is clearly understandable when analysing the strategies needed to adapt to the new school (which is usually hard on the newcomers) where the peer group is central to such a strategy, in that it offers a source of support. This study and another ethnographic work in a Mexican secondary school (Levinson 2001) emphasise the process of construction of peer group membership as a key feature of pupils' passage through secondary school.

These last studies raise the importance of creating a sense of belonging within the new school setting, which has been signaled as a major avenue for facilitating successful transition (Anderson et al. 2000, quoted in Rice 2001: 391). Cueto et al. (2009) investigated the sense of belonging among Peruvian pupils in their first year of secondary school through surveys and semi-structured interviews. They found that rural pupils had a higher sense of belonging than their urban peers. This may be attributed to several factors, including that rural pupils seemed to have stronger relationships with their peers in the sense that they meet outside school, walk together to and from school every day, work together with some of their classmates in agricultural tasks in their hometowns, or know other pupils because they live in their same community or in a neighbouring one.

These studies show a wealth of findings from different countries, indicating similarities and contrasts. They also reveal different ways to approach methodologically the study of the transition process, which we took into account in the present study. Our study is mostly concerned with children's expectations and experiences about the transition process, and therefore can be located within the second strand of the literature referred above. The study

predominantly uses a qualitative approach, but we also used survey data collected for the full Young Lives sample. The longitudinal nature of the study also allows for the following of selected children from their last year of primary school to their first year in secondary school, although others were interviewed first at their first year in secondary school and were then followed up the next year. Research participants include urban and rural schools and pupils.

## **Research questions**

Initially, we approached the research with both cohorts with three broad, exploratory questions:

1. What are the key transitions in children's lives, how are they experienced and what influences these experiences?
2. How is children's well-being understood and evaluated by children, caregivers and other stakeholders, and what do they identify as sources of and threats to well-being?
3. How do policies, programmes and services shape children's transitions and well-being?

During the course of the research we identify the transition from primary to secondary school as a key transition children of the Older Cohort were experiencing and thus pay particular attention to it. Preliminary analysis (Ames et al. 2009) also showed that children's understanding of well-being considered education as a key feature of their own well-being. The information gathered about availability and characteristics of educational programmes and services showed us these issues shaped different itineraries and ways of experiencing the transition to secondary school. Therefore our research questions were narrowed down to better understand the transition process from the point of view of the children themselves, in relation to their own understandings of well-being, but also paying attention to structural conditions affecting such experiences, such as poverty, gender inequity, ethnic discrimination, etc. This paper therefore concentrates on the following questions:

1. How are children living the experience of transition from primary to secondary school?  
In particular, what changes and challenges do they identify when making the transition from one school to another? How do they adapt to the new environment? What sources of support do they identify?
2. In what ways is the transition to secondary school linked to children's well-being and how do they see this relation?
3. How do different factors and circumstances such as location, poverty, ethnicity and gender affect children's transitions and trajectories?

## **Research participants and methodology**

The full Young Lives sample is pro-poor, and thus the richest 5 per cent of the population have been excluded. Approximately 75 per cent of sample sites are considered poor and 25 per cent non-poor according to the most recent poverty map available when the survey started (Escobal et al. 2008). The full sample is distributed across 20 sites, but the qualitative research was carried out only in four of these sites. The sites contrast not only in terms of area of residence (rural/urban) but also by geographical location (Coast, Andes, Amazon); poverty (poor and non-poor); presence or absence of indigenous population; and degree of

impact of recent political violence (post-conflict areas).<sup>3</sup> In each district we based our work in one community, but in several cases we had to visit neighbouring communities and several schools to follow children. Communities and districts remain anonymous, but the name of the province is indicated. The communities (named after the province) where the subsample is located are briefly described below:

- *Rioja* is a rural community settled in the Upper Amazon, in the region of San Martín, located in the north of the country. The village is 10 minutes by car from the district capital, about one hour from the provincial capital and three to four hours from the regional capital. The *Carretera Marginal*, an important highway connecting several provinces and regions, passes through the village. The village, like most of the region, is populated largely by Spanish-speaking Andean immigrants. The village has about 1,673 inhabitants, dedicated mainly to agriculture (coffee) and cattle raising. Basic services in the village include piped water but no sewage system, and electricity did not arrive until August 2007. There is a pre-school, primary and secondary school in the village as well as a public health post<sup>4</sup>. Two other neighbouring villages were visited in this district. One is located next to Rioja, about five minutes away by car. It is smaller than Rioja, with about 183 households. It has a pre-school and a primary school, but not a secondary school, and similar services: piped water and latrines, with electricity about to be installed in August 2007. The other village is even smaller (about 40 households) and is not along the road but within the forest. Here there is a multigrade primary school with two teachers for six grades. There is no health service in the village, and no piped water, sewage or electricity.
- *Andahuaylas* is a peasant community located in the southern highlands of Peru, between 3,000 and 3,500 metres in altitude, in one of the poorest regions of the country, Apurímac. The journey by car to the village from the district capital takes about 30 minutes and it is 45 minutes from the provincial capital. The road that connects the latter with the regional capital passes through the village after about eight hours. Houses are dispersed through the hills in which the farming areas are located. The village is inhabited by the Quechua indigenous population. There are about 2,014 inhabitants grouped into 335 households. The population is dedicated mostly to agriculture (potatoes and corn), with cattle raising as a secondary activity. Basic services available are piped water, electricity and latrines (the latter only in 40 households). The village has a pre-school, primary and secondary school, and a public health post. The region suffered seriously from the political violence in the country between 1980 and 1992 and can certainly be considered a post-conflict area.
- *San Román* is a city in the southern Andes, at about 4,000 metres in altitude, in the region of Puno. It represents the economic and commercial centre of the region. The city is inhabited not only by Spanish-speaking people, but also by members of the two main indigenous groups in the Andes: Quechua and, especially, Aymara. Much of the population is of rural origin and the people keep their links with their birthplaces. Here we worked in four neighbourhoods, the biggest of which has about 3,000 households (15,000 inhabitants) and the smallest 143 households and 715

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3 Between 1980 and 1992 there was an internal armed conflict in Peru, which cost the lives of about 75,000 people. Some regions in the country were more affected than others by violence produced by conflict. Those are the ones we refer to as post-conflict areas. See Comisión de la Verdad y la Reconciliación 2003.

4 A health post is the smallest health facility in the Peruvian health system, providing basic healthcare for the population, usually in charge of a nurse or a nurse (technical) aid, with occasional doctor visits.

inhabitants. The population is dedicated to formal and informal trade, commerce and the textile industry. In addition to formal and informal trade, the city is known for two highly profitable (although illegal) activities: drug dealing and smuggling. As an urban settlement, there is electricity, piped water and sewage, as well as telephone and internet in the four communities. However, only a few streets are paved. There is a public pre-school and primary school in the main neighbourhood, as well as some private schools, a regional hospital and a park. Secondary schools are available in other nearby neighbourhoods.

- *Lima 3* is also an urban settlement, located in the southern part of Lima, the national capital. The main neighbourhood we visited has about 1,118 households (7,825 people), but some children attend school in the adjacent neighbourhood, so this is also included in the study. *Lima 3* is located in one of the districts founded through invasions of the desert hills surrounding the city, which started back in the 1950s. Today, the district has about 350,000 inhabitants, making it one of the most populous in the capital city. The population is made up of people who come from all over the country plus new generations born in Lima. Inhabitants are dedicated to a variety of economic activities, from informal trade to teaching. As an urban settlement, there is electricity, piped water and sewage, plus telephone and internet services. Most streets are paved. There are several schools in these and the surrounding neighbourhoods, including public and private pre-schools, primary schools and secondary schools, as well as a vocational centre and an academy preparing students for university admission. There is also a health centre.

This study's research participants are 25 children from these four places. The children were between 11 to 13 years old, which is the usual age for making the transition to secondary school in Peru. Five children were attending the last grade at primary school in four different primary schools when we first visited them. With them, we asked about their expectations and the information they had received about secondary school, and we visited them again a year later to contrast their expectations with their actual experience. The remaining 20 children were already in the first years of secondary school when we first visited them and attended 13 different secondary schools. With them, we explored their perceptions and opinions about the transition process they had gone through and how much this had matched their expectations, as well as how their experiences and perceptions evolved over time, since we also visited them a year later.

The study follows a mixed-method approach (Crivello et al. 2009) that combines several techniques of qualitative data collection. First, we conducted participatory techniques (both collective and individual) including group discussion, drawing, drama, photography and video making. Group participatory techniques were used first in order to gain confidence and build rapport with research participants before doing individual interviews. Afterwards we used semi-structured, in-depth interviews with every case-study child (25), as well as with their parents (25) and some of their teachers (18). The interviews were conducted individually in the children's homes or in open spaces in their communities.

Among the participatory techniques we used, two were especially useful for the topic of this paper – *Educational transitions: vignettes and storytelling* and *Well-being exercise: draw and tell*. The *Educational transitions: vignettes and storytelling* session started with a brief group discussion with the children on how the transition to secondary school was or how they imagine it will be. Then we offered children three different vignettes to prompt different transition issues usually found when going to secondary school and asked the children to continue the story collectively (see the vignettes provided in the Appendix). After they had

created different stories, we asked the children to choose the one they liked the most and to act it as a drama piece. Usually the children chose the situation they felt more close to and the dramatisation added new details to their story and points of view on the transition itself. The performance was videoed with the children's consent and they got the chance to see themselves in the video.

In the second technique, *Well-being exercise: draw and tell*, we asked the children to imagine and draw one child of the same age and gender as themselves who is doing well in life and one who is not. Once each drawing was finished, we discussed the drawings collectively with the group. The discussion allowed the identification of well-being indicators from the point of view of the children themselves (rather than the imposition of our own definition), as well as the relative importance of each such indicator because we asked children to rank them (see Crivello et al. 2009 for more details; see also Ames et al. 2010 for a detailed description of all the participatory techniques used in Peru).

In addition to participatory methods, we employed semi-participant observation at children's homes and communities and classroom observation at primary and secondary levels (in 19 classrooms), as well as group interviews with community leaders, parents and local representatives. Data from the two previous surveys applied to the broader sample of Young Lives children (in 2002 and 2006/7) was also used as part of the analysis.

## 2. The educational context: secondary schooling in Peru

This section offers a brief overview of the wider educational context of this research, acknowledging society's achievements in getting more children enrolled at secondary school level and indicating the challenges still remaining to ensure quality education for all. We use available national statistics, as well as survey data from the Young Lives full sample and review literature in Peru to highlight the more salient issues affecting secondary education.

Although Peru has almost reached the target of universal primary education, with a net enrolment rate of 94.2 per cent in 2008 (ONU, PCM 2009), enrolment in secondary education is not yet universal and shows important gaps related to area of residence, poverty levels and ethnicity. Secondary school enrolment does not show significant gender gaps, with a Gender Parity Index (GPI) of 1.019 (ONU, PCM 2009). The net enrolment rate in 2007 was 74 per cent for girls versus 75 per cent for boys; in rural areas there was no significant difference between boys and girls (63.3 per cent versus 63.6 per cent respectively) but note enrolment is much less (Ministerio de Educación 2008). Thus, while 82 per cent of urban children aged 12 to 16 years were enrolled in secondary school, only 63.5 per cent of their rural peers were (Ministerio de Educación 2008). A similar gap occurs according to poverty level, with non-poor children showing an enrolment rate of 84 per cent while for children in extreme poverty it was 53 per cent.<sup>5</sup> Children from some indigenous groups, such as the

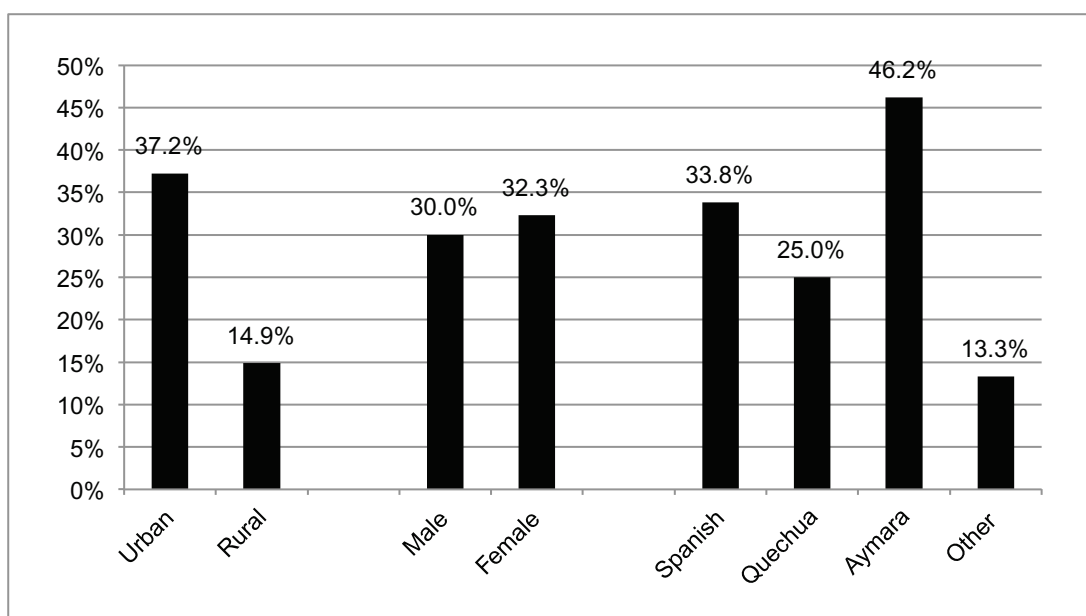
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5 Extreme poverty is defined as income below the value of food requirements to satisfy the minimum nutritional needs. Poverty is defined as income below the value to satisfy a set of essential needs (beyond food intake) such as housing, clothes, recreation, health, etc (INEI 2007).

Ashaninkas, also show low (total) enrolment rates, with, for example, a figure of 67 per cent for the Ashaninkas (Ministerio de Educación 2008).

Within the full Young Lives sample, 210 children out of 679 were attending secondary school when Round 2 took place (2006/2007).<sup>6</sup> Examining their enrolment figures according to area of residence, gender and ethnicity, similar inequalities to those found in national statistics are evident, as Figure 1 shows:

**Figure 1.** *Secondary school enrolment in the YL sample according to area of residence, gender and mother tongue, 2006*



Source: Young Lives Round 2 Data, Peru

Thus, a larger proportion of children in urban areas had started secondary school by the time of the survey, similar proportions of boys and girls were enrolled and more Spanish speakers than Quechua or other speakers of indigenous languages were enrolled, with the exception of Aymara speakers, who showed the highest enrolment rate among all linguistic groups.<sup>7</sup>

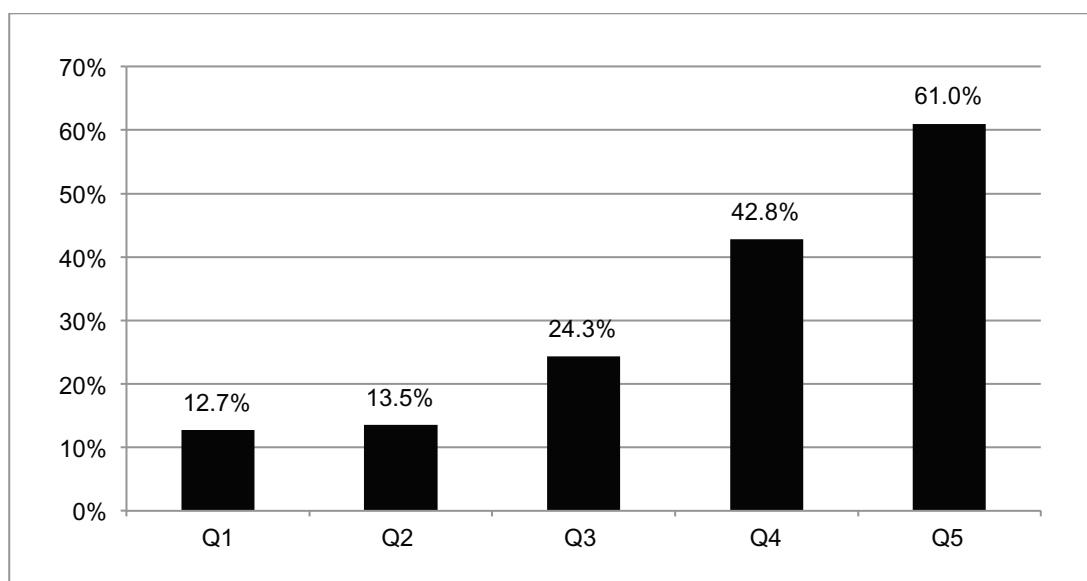
Dividing the population according to wealth index also shows greater enrolment for less poor quintiles, as shown in Figure 2, where Q1 is the poorest quintile, while Q5 is the least poor:

<sup>6</sup> Of the 679 children in the Young Lives sample, 461 children were in primary school and only eight were not attending any school.

<sup>7</sup> This is consistent with national statistics, although the gap is smaller.



**Figure 2.** *Enrolment in secondary schools according to wealth quintiles*



Source: Young Lives Round 2 Data, Peru

Apart from enrolment rates, other indicators at national level show worrying figures and similar inequalities between rural and urban areas, ethnic groups and poverty levels. For example, the Ministry of Education reported for 2007 that transition to secondary school is almost universal in urban areas (97.5 per cent) but not so high in rural areas (88 per cent) or among children in extreme poverty (88 per cent) (Ministerio de Educación 2008). A major concern, however, is that the completion rate for secondary education in rural areas is just 36 per cent, about half of what it is for urban areas (72 per cent); children in extreme poverty show an even lower rate (27 per cent) for completion of secondary schooling (Ministerio de Educación 2008). Therefore, a significant proportion of children who start secondary schooling do not complete their studies.

Results and learning outcomes also mirror inequalities in enrolment and progress through secondary school, as showed in the last National Examination (2004): rural pupils achieved lower scores than their urban peers (see Table 1), although both scored low.<sup>8</sup> For example, in reading comprehension, while 7.6 per cent of urban pupils in the last year of secondary school performed adequately for their grade level, only 2.1 per cent of rural pupils did (Unidad de Medición de la Calidad Educativa 2004).

<sup>8</sup> The National Examination is conducted by the Unit of Quality Measurement (UMC in Spanish) at the Peruvian Ministry of Education. The National Evaluation in 2004 is the fourth conducted in the country. Standardised tests based in the Peruvian curriculum, in the areas of Mathematics and Reading Comprehension, are administered to a nationally representative sample of children from selected grades at primary (second and sixth) and secondary (third and fifth) levels. Sufficient school achievement is determined according to the national curriculum objectives for each grade (i.e. the student performs according to his or her grade level).

**Table 1.** *Percentage of pupils with sufficient school achievement in secondary education*

	Percentage of secondary school population			
	Reading comprehension		Mathematics	
	Grade 3	Grade 5	Grade 3	Grade 5
	2004	2004	2004	2004
PERU	15.1	9.8	6.0	2.9
<b>Area</b>				
Urban	11.1	7.6	2.4	0.9
Rural	3.3	2.1	0.2	-

Source: National Achievement Test 2004 Peru (Ministerio de Educación-Unidad de Medición de la Calidad Educativa)

Several problems related to secondary education, particularly in rural areas, have been identified in Peruvian literature. One is the limited availability of secondary schools: in 2007 there were 23,329 primary schools in rural areas but only 3,782 secondary schools; in contrast, urban areas had fewer primary schools (12,773) but more than double the number of secondary schools (7,762) (Ministerio de Educación 2008).<sup>9</sup> As a result, many rural pupils have to travel or move to urban areas for secondary education (see, for example, Cueto et al. 2009); some studies point out that there are higher costs involved in attending schools far from home that may work against enrolment and completion rates (Montero et al. 2001). Also, the poverty of the population and the involvement of children in paid work are factors that influence on school drop-out (Alcazar 2008) and attendance rates (Rodríguez 2002). Issues of isolation, lack of resources and mismanagement of secondary schools, which affect overall educational quality, have been highlighted in rural areas (Benavides 2007). Finally, the many changes in curriculum frameworks for secondary education (four in a 10-year period), as well as issues of overall educational quality and student participation, have been studied in urban secondary schools (Belaunde 2006; León and Staheli 2001). Little is known, however, about how pupils entering secondary school view and experience this process.

Only one study (Cueto et al. 2009) addresses the issue of transition to secondary school in Peru and considers children's perspectives. The study focuses on the sense of belonging experienced by pupils in their first year of secondary education. The study was conducted with a different subsample from Young Lives, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. It found that socioeconomic status had no direct effect on a pupil's sense of belonging but had an indirect effect through achievement. It also found that rural pupils had a greater sense of belonging than their urban peers. The study reported that some general orientation activities aimed at all incoming first-graders were organised by teachers and head-teachers but that there was nothing designed specifically for pupils who might face difficulties in adjusting to secondary school. More specific findings from this study will be discussed throughout this paper.

The lack of attention paid to the issue of transition from primary to secondary school in Peruvian studies contrasts with international interest in the topic. Increasingly, researchers and policymakers recognise the importance of effective transition to secondary school and seek for ways to improve it (see, for example, Evangelou et al. 2008). However, our study did

<sup>9</sup> It is true on the other hand that most children from 12 to 16 years old (that is, at the age for going to secondary school) live in urban areas (73 per cent) in contrast with a smaller percentage in rural areas (27 per cent) (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática 2007). However, the lack of secondary schools in rural areas may be reinforcing the need to migrate to pursue secondary education, as we will see in this paper.

not find at school level any organised and institutional activity aimed at easing or helping the transition to secondary school. The discontinuity between primary and secondary schools was not only evident but also explicit. The way of organising teachers (from one to eight per class), courses (from four integrated areas to more than a dozen specialised subjects), pedagogy (and teaching styles), and time (more school hours and more complex timetabling) is markedly different in primary and secondary school. However, although this discontinuity may be commented on informally among teachers and pupils, as we will see, no formal ways of providing induction for children making the transition are in place. In Peru, secondary schools may be independent from primary schools or integrated with one primary school, but in either case the way they are organised is markedly different. We will approach such differences from the point of view of the pupils themselves in the next section. Almost all case-study children share a common set of perceptions about the changes they will face when making the transition to secondary school; Section 3 is dedicated to such commonalities. However, children also experience different types of arrangements for studying their secondary education, shaping different paths and circumstances, which will be addressed in Section 4.

### 3. Big changes: children's perspectives on transition to secondary school

This section presents children's perspectives on their transition to secondary school, focusing especially on the commonalities that arose across the 25 case studies, but indicating also the differences and contrasts when they appear, although the following section will examine the latter in more detail.

Transition from primary to secondary school implies a set of changes, from changing school to changing teacher(s), from changing teaching styles to curriculum and organisational changes, as well as changes in classroom and school environment and social relationships among people in this new scenario. Some authors have argued that concerns related to school and those related to peers and social relations constitute two separate dimensions of the transition to secondary school, which are equally important and should be addressed on their own, suggesting that the transition to secondary school should be seen as navigations through both the formal (school) and informal (peer) social systems (West et al. 2010: 44).

When we inquired about what changes children notice the most and how they deal with them, both formal and informal issues appeared. This section presents the issues concerning school first and approaches the social issues later, although they are indeed profoundly interlinked.

We first start by paying attention to the sources of information children have prior to the transition so as to understand what they knew before making the transition and how they got that information. We then address the main changes perceived by children - the increased number of teachers and subjects, the difficulty attributed to secondary schooling and the opportunity it opens up in terms of greater autonomy - and finally, the physical changes in the school scenario. Next, we look at a central concern for children - the issue of social and peer relations. They are related to the fears and concerns that are also explored before we turn to the positive overall assessment of the transition that children show.

### 3.1 Getting to know what to expect: sources of information

The children indicated various sources of information for what to expect of secondary education: their primary teachers, their parents, older siblings and friends. However, not all these sources provided the same and consistent information: in some cases, especially in rural areas, older siblings may be better prepared than parents to advise children, since the parents may never have been enrolled in secondary school. The type of information peers and teachers may provide could vary and there may be some exaggeration.

The children pointed out that there may be counterproductive effects when the information they get is too negative (that is, when it highlights the difficult side of the transition): they may then enter secondary school with more fears than necessary (thus causing anxiety) and lose interest in their studies. This concern was raised by a group of six boys in a participatory exercise to talk about the transition to secondary school (see methods section for details). The children created the following story out of a heading offered by facilitators (in italics in the box below):

*Juan is in Grade 6 of primary education, he will soon end primary and start secondary school. But the secondary school is far away and this worries him. Also his teachers have told him many things about secondary school such as ...they are stricter and it is more difficult. All that he has heard has discouraged him. He feels less enthusiastic since everybody says it is so difficult. But he should not listen only to the bad things that people at primary school say. His parents tell him that a boy has to put effort into this. (...) If Juan only listens to those who say secondary school is difficult, probably he will get scared of studying and won't put so much effort into school. (Group session with boys on educational transitions, San Román)*

As we will see below, although secondary school is considered more difficult and knowing this in advance may be useful, according to these children it is necessary to be careful not to scare children by stressing such difficulties too much. Indeed, other authors point out how children usually receive warnings that are in many cases exaggerated and which generate anxiety (Gimeno Sacristan 1997; Measor and Woods 1984), but also how most pupils disconfirm such “myths” after a short period of time (Chedzoy and Burden 2005).

According to the children, information about the transition to secondary school comes through informal means of communication, such as conversations, advice, warnings and so on. However, although it is clear that some primary teachers advance some information regarding the way secondary school functions (several teachers, specialised subjects) and its demands (higher), children did not reported any structured activity or programme carried out by either primary or secondary school to facilitate the transition or the induction into secondary school. Nor do any parents or teachers report such programmes. However, primary school does mark the “passage” children are going to experience through ritualistic moments such as the “graduation” ceremony or the “prom journey” (end-of-primary-school trip to a nearby city). Thus, although the school recognizes the “end” of a phase, the information children report receiving seems rather fragmented and informal, and some children don't even receive some basic information such as the increase in the number of teachers and subjects, as we address next.

### 3.2 “There are more subjects and teachers in secondary school”

The most noticeable change – from the point of view of children themselves – and the most evident is the change from a single teacher in charge of all subjects to different specialised

teachers for each school subject. This finding is consistent with what Cueto et al. (2009) found in another subsample of Young Lives children. Although this fact may be considered obvious, it reflects a deep change between primary and secondary school, because it shows a new and different conception about knowledge (as more specialised and compartmentalised instead of the integrated curriculum approach promoted in primary schools). It also reflects a new organisation for imparting knowledge: each subject is distributed among different professionals in charge of their subject, not so much the class as a whole and as a group, as it was with the primary teacher.

Most children know this will happen because they have several sources of information, and it is one of the differences between primary and secondary school usually commented on. But there were a couple of children for whom this was a novelty and a strange discovery, as in the case of Fabian and John, two urban boys from Lima attending different secondary schools.<sup>10</sup> They were surprised by the different arrangements they found when making the transition to secondary school, as they report in their interviews.

**Interviewer:** What is different from primary to secondary?

**Fabian:** Ah, in primary you have only one teacher, in contrast, in secondary you have a different teacher each hour, a man, a woman.

**Interviewer:** Did it affect you? ... How?

**Fabian:** Yes... I didn't know, it was not the same person but different each time... I felt a bit weird (...) it is different, more subjects too, many teachers, not just one.

**John:** ... I did not know you change from one teacher to the next (...) It was a bit weird.

**Interviewer:** Why?

**John:** Because one teacher came, then go, then another came and then another. I ask a friend and he said 'it is because each teacher teaches only one subject'.

To have several teachers instead of one puts children in contact with more adults but for a briefer period, so the children not only then face different teaching styles during the day and the week, but also a new curriculum with new areas of knowledge; there are more school subjects, some of which (like English) are never taught at primary level or else are taught in very basic ways, as Eva from Andahuaylas and Natalia from Rioja point out:

**Interviewer:** What things were taught in secondary but not in primary?

**Eva:** They teach me other courses... that I did not take in primary (...) because in primary you take only 5 courses but in secondary (you take) 12 subjects.

**Natalia:** [Secondary school] Is more difficult.

**Interviewer:** For example, what course did you find difficult?

**Natalia:** English.

**Interviewer:** Did they teach you English in primary school?

**Natalia:** No.

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<sup>10</sup> All personal names have been replaced to protect the identity of the research participants.

### 3.3 Key challenges: Secondary schooling as more “difficult”

Linked to a greater number of subjects and teachers, we find that in almost every case, children indicate that secondary school is “harder” or “more difficult” and that they have more homework to do. “Difficult” here seems to refer not only to the increase in the number of subjects and amount of homework, but also to the more demanding nature of schoolwork, both in quality and quantity, thus requiring more time and effort from the pupil. This feature may produce problems in adapting for the child, which in turn may be translated into the children’s learning outcomes, as some of them point out:

**Interviewer:** When you pass from primary to secondary education, what did you think about secondary (school)?

**Peter:** That it was going to be difficult ... we were going to have more courses... it has been a bit more difficult [especially] homework, a lot of homework

*(Urban boy, San Román)*

**Susan:** I was affected when I just entered [secondary school] I did badly with one or two courses.

**Interviewer:** What happened?

**Susan:** I was kind of lazy, I did not want to do my homework. Besides I didn’t know, I did not find the information. It was another type of information [other than] what I have in my primary book, it was not the same, it was different. I need something more advanced, I had my encyclopedia but I search, search and did not find [anything]; and sometimes I also feel laziness to search... it is a lot of pages the encyclopedia, a lot.

**Interviewer:** Did you think it was going to be the same than primary school?

**Susan:** More difficult.

**Interviewer:** And now you are in first year how it is different from primary school?

**Susan:** It is more advanced, I mean, it is the same but more advanced. Superior.

*(Urban girl, Lima 3)*

Children who were still in primary school at our first visit also thought that secondary school was going to be more difficult, since they envisaged the changes above mentioned (more subjects and teachers) and more demanding schoolwork.

**Interviewer:** Do you think secondary [school] is going to be more difficult or easier?

**Sandro:** Difficult.

**Interviewer:** Because what you told me before about more courses?

**Sandro:** Yes,... [and] because there are also exams all the time.

*(Rural boy, Andahuaylas)*

Once Sandro had experienced the transition we visited him again and confirmed that his expectations were well-founded: secondary school was still difficult for him even in the second term.

**Interviewer:** Why it was different [secondary from primary school]?

**Sandro:** Because we take more courses and homework... it was more difficult.

**Interviewer:** So how long did you take to get use to it?

**Sandro:** Until today.

**Interviewer:** What is the most difficult thing to get use to?

**Sandro:** More homework, more courses.

*(Rural boy, Andahuaylas)*

Both the expectation of future difficulty by sixth-graders (primary school) and confirmation of it by first-graders (secondary school) seem to be common in other contexts (Howard and Johnson 2004; Galton 2009). However, in contrast with Sandro, most of the children who made the transition think it is less difficult than they expected. There are several things, however, that could make things more difficult for Sandro: his mother tongue is Quechua, but secondary schooling is entirely in Spanish, his second language. Also, although other children are in the same situation as Sandro, he is shy and is more insecure about his transition. His case reminds us that although there are commonalities across cases, the transition from primary to secondary school is an individual experience and personal characteristics impact on it (West et al. 2010; Chedzoy and Burden 2005).

### 3.4 Key opportunities: advancement and greater autonomy

The difficulty children identify about secondary schooling has a positive side too, as Susan suggested in an earlier quote: secondary school is also associated with a “superior”, “more advanced” level, with “more thinking”. Felipe tends towards the same opinion:

It is a bit more complicated, teaching [in secondary school] it is more advanced because sometimes they do some topics you don't see in primary and sometimes you don't understand. *(Felipe, urban boy, San Román)*

This “more advanced” teaching is in turn regarded in a positive light. The children say they learn more and have better teachers. The very word “advanced” appears to be associated with a narrative of progress and growth. In fact, to enter into secondary school, inasmuch as it poses challenges, also implies new opportunities and greater autonomy and independence for pupils. Thus for example, while on the one hand children have to be “more responsible” with their school and homework, on the other hand they are less supervised and are expected to be more autonomous.

The very organisation of secondary school teaching, with small breaks between lessons for teachers to move from one classroom to the next, is also seen by children as an opportunity to act with more freedom:

**Interviewer:** How it is different secondary school?

**Rodrigo:** In primary if you want to take a stroll, you have to wait until school break. In secondary school, if you want to go out to go to the bathroom, you go in between classes. *(Rural boy, Rioja)*

Every two hours teachers change and you get 5 minutes to go and relax.  
*(Luis, rural boy, Rioja)*

This greater autonomy is also visible in the relationships between teachers and pupils. Thus, if for some children it was shocking (and more impersonal) to go from one teacher to several, for others this offered a positive situation in that it means greater variety and less control by one person. Indeed, in those schools where the primary teacher traditionally accompanies the same class through all the years in primary school, for some pupils this may be felt as “boring”, to quote one child. Also, if the teacher is not good and does not teach well, the pupil does not learn as much. In contrast, having several teachers offers greater variety, more chance to have good teachers, and thus to learn more. The fact that the teachers know each pupil less well individually and dedicate less time to the control of each one may also mean greater freedom for the pupils:

**Interviewer:** So, what do you think is better, one teacher or many?

**Aurora:** Mmh... yeah, perhaps many teachers (...) It's just that [only] one teacher, he yells at you, he knows you already... (*Urban girl, San Roman*)

**Luis:** In primary you have only one teacher, all the way to the school break and then, after, it is the same teacher again. It's boring (...).

**Interviewer:** So, you like to have different teachers, why?

**Luis:** Sometimes with one teacher you feel sad and the other makes you happy.

(*Rural boy, Rioja*)

In contrast, a couple of children dislike this greater distance between student and teacher and would prefer more personal treatment and greater attention from their teachers, as they used to have in primary school. This is not just an emotional claim but an academic one too, since with more time and attention to give to each child, a teacher can explain better when a child does not understand.

The greater autonomy children feel they gain in secondary school is also considered a positive by most of them because they feel more “grown up” at this age as they reach puberty. However, not all children consider themselves at the same point: some still described themselves as a “child” while others described themselves as a “young person” or “adolescent”. So their demands for more attention or greater independence are also related to their evolving self-perception.

Children generally see secondary school as stricter, but mechanisms and means of control vary from one place to the next. Thus, in some cases such as Rioja (and, in a way, Lima 3), going from primary to secondary school means no more physical punishment, since in secondary school there would be less physical and more impersonal ways to sanction misbehavior. In other cases, however, such as San Román (and also Andahuaylas to some extent), secondary schools exhibit a greater and harder range of ways to physically punish children than the children had experienced in primary schools.

**Interviewer:** How did you think it was going to be when you just started Grade 1 of secondary school?

**Maria:** Difficult.

**Interviewer:** Difficult. What people say to you?

**Maria:** They say it is ugly, that they lower your grades a lot... They don't hit you with ruler but lower your grade.



**Interviewer:** So in primary school they do hit with ruler?

**Maria:** Yes, in [primary school] they hit us, in secondary [school] not anymore.

*(Rural girl, Rioja)*

They are stricter in secondary school, but not so in primary school, you go with a tie and if you lower it, it was ok, or if you wear the shirt outside [your pants], or if you go dirty... In secondary school they lower your grade, but not in primary. In primary they call you names, they talk to you, they yell at you, and when you do something really bad, they lower your grades and call your dad, but in secondary school they just lower your grades. *(Fabian, urban boy, Lima)*

### 3.5 Changes in settings

Besides curricular, organisational, pedagogical and disciplinary changes, pupils highlight the physical changes involved in the transition from primary to secondary school: in general, the secondary schools they attend are bigger than primary schools and have more pupils, especially in cases like Eva, who commutes to the secondary school in the district capital, or Luis, who attends the secondary school in his rural village, one that serves several other villages too:

**Eva:** Secondary school is bigger, in primary school there are fewer children... [in secondary school] there are many classrooms. *(Rural girl, Andahuaylas)*

**Luis:** [Secondary school] is nicer (...) because it has second floor (...) the classroom is big. *(Rural boy, Rioja)*

This physical infrastructure however is not always in good conditions, and urban children are particularly critical about it:

In the secondary school all windows are broken, in the primary school almost none. *(Aurora, urban girl, San Román)*

Toilets were cleaner in primary school, (they) pour water all the time (...but) in secondary is quite the opposite. *(Hank, urban boy, San Román)*

Changes in physical spaces and practical arrangements emerged as less of an issue than has been reported in other contexts, perhaps because of the different organisational arrangements in place. The size of the secondary schools visited ranged from 150 to 2,500 pupils, so some children attend relatively small schools. Also, the children remain in their classroom during the school day and it is the teacher who moves around.

The change in the physical space that children report is in turn linked with changes in social relationships. As we have already noted, depending on the circumstances of the transition, many pupils will have new classmates; this represents a challenge which is seen as potentially positive but also as a risk.

### 3.6 “I did not know anybody”: changes in social relationships

Most children we interviewed stressed the importance of social relations when doing this particular transition. The transition to secondary school itself involves in most cases a change in such relationships, since children met not only new teachers, as we already saw, but, more importantly, new classmates.

The different paths children follow in their transfer from one school to another impacts particularly on this issue. Thus for example, those children that transfer from one primary school to a different secondary school may experience this as a very lonely process, as John, an urban boy in Lima 3 highlights when asked what happened when he changed schools to start secondary school: 'I did not know anybody in the other school'. In the same way, Hank, another urban boy but living in San Roman and attending a private school, when reflecting back on his transition, said he would have liked to have a friend to alleviate the loneliness he felt at the beginning.

However, other children transferring schools do so in the company of children they already know, which seems to ease the transition a lot, as Felipe signaled when participating in a group discussion and comparing his experience with others, such as Hank: 'I didn't feel alone (at secondary school) because there were other kids from my (primary) school, from my neighbourhood'.

The importance of making the transition with known classmates and friends has been highlighted by previous studies in other countries, which found that: (1) the transition is perceived as less threatening in this situation (Berndt 1989, quoted in Sirsch 2003: 393); (2) moving with friends supports integration into secondary school (Berndt, Hawkins and Jiao, 1990, quoted by Sirsch 2003: 393) and is seen as a greater advantage (Howard and Johnson 2004); and (3) a good start is associated with maintaining old friendships and making new ones (Mitman and Packer 1982, quoted by Sirsch 2003: 393; Howard and Johnson 2004). Therefore, those children making the transition in the same school and those transferring along with friends and old classmates seem to be in better position than those moving alone to a new school. Indeed, as other studies have shown, this factor can be a powerful factor in choosing a secondary school (Martínez and Quiroz 2007; Gimeno Sacristan 1997)

Why it is that known peers become so important in the transition to secondary school? According to the children we interviewed, peers are seen in various ways as a source of emotional and practical support in going through the process of adapting to the new environment. This was clear, for example, in the stories they created about hypothetical transition situations we proposed as part of a participatory session (see the methods section for more detail). For example, rural girls in Rioja created and performed a short story about Paola, a fictitious girl just entering Grade 1 of secondary school. The only indication to prompt the story was that she felt strange because she was in a new school with new teachers and classmates. The girls' performance was as follows:<sup>11</sup>

**Characters: Paola, her teacher, her mother, her friend**

**Scene 1**

**Teacher:** I notice you are a bit sad, shy, I don't see you hanging around with your classmates, tell me Paola, what happens to you?

**Paola:** It is just that I have no friends ... and I have more courses.

The teacher tries and finds a way to help her.

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11 The performance was videotaped with the consent of the children. The box shows the transcription of the tape.

**Scene 2**

**Teacher** (to a group of pupils): I am going to ask you to do a group work and Paola is going to be in the group, you have to help her, because she is a shy girl.

Afterwards, the teacher asks Paola how it was, and she said it was fine. The teacher then goes and talks with her mother:

**Scene 3**

**Teacher:** I have come to see you because Paola was very shy, but she has changed, you surely advise her.

**Paola's mother:** Yes, I tell her to make her best effort and to get to know her classmates step by step.

**Scene 4**

Paola got a new (female) friend.

**Friend:** You have to go ahead [carry on]; don't worry because I am going to help you with your homework.

**Paola:** Yes, I agree, thank you.

*(Group session with girls on educational transitions, Rioja)*

This story shows several important issues, but the first one is that girls chose to perform a story very close to their own situation (as part of the session they created three different stories and were asked to choose the one they liked most to perform). These girls were all just entering Grade 1 of secondary school, and although they knew each other from primary school, they were entering a new school where there were new pupils from other towns and the girls felt shy about this. It is interesting to note in the story the important role girls attributed to the teacher in promoting friendships among pupils, and also the advice they highlight from the mother, which shows the kind of support these girls expect from significant adults in their lives when making this transition. However, the girls identified as Paola's main problem as her lack of friends (social relations) and, in second place, the many subjects (academic challenges). The solution was therefore to find her friends, and once Paola got one, the dialogue between them stressed that the friend is providing moral ('you have to go ahead [carry on]') as well as academic support ('I am going to help you with your homework').

Boys also stressed the academic support one gets from peers. For example, the importance of friends arose in the context of making the transition within the same institution, as Sandro points out:

**Interviewer:** Why are friends important?

**Sandro:** Because they help you in class.

The importance of friends is even greater when the context is new and unknown. Elmer, who moved from Rioja to Lima 3 to start secondary school, stressed, at various points in the interview, that a friend was a major help in adapting to the new environment, and also highlighted the emotional and academic dimension of this:

**Interviewer:** So, before you started secondary school, how did you think it was going to be?

**Elmer:** I thought it was going to be ugly, (..) because I had no friends (...) but it wasn't like that (...) it was nice (..) I met a friend (...) he helped me (...).

**Interviewer:** So, who helped [you] to adapt better?

**Elmer:** My friend.

**Interviewer:** How it is that friends are important?

**Elmer:** You do homework like playing.

The anxiety around keeping and making new friends during the transition seems to be especially important at this age and is reported in other contexts such as Australia (Howard and Johnson 2004), where it was found this was a major factor between “doing ok” and “not doing ok” in secondary school. In the UK, Galton (2009), based on a review of 24 studies, reports that the most frequent concerns of pupils (both in the last year of primary school and in the first year of secondary school) are related to making new friends and retaining the old ones. The same finding is reported in the study by Pratt and George (2005), who highlight the key importance of peer relationships and friendship in the transition from primary to secondary school, confirming thus previous findings on the key role of friendships in providing support, reassurance and security (Measor and Woods 1984).

However, in the case of Peru, it is necessary to consider an additional issue that makes peer support especially valuable: the academic support children receive from peers may be the only one available to them. Indeed, in the rural communities, in most cases, these children, just by being at the beginning of secondary school, were outperforming the educational background of their parents. In rural Rioja, for example, where the girls in the example above live, four out of seven mothers of case-study children had only attended some years of primary school, two had attended one year of secondary school before leaving school, and one had no schooling at all. In rural Andahuaylas, where Sandro lives, only one mother had incomplete secondary education and six did not have any schooling at all. Although fathers usually have higher educational levels than mothers, only one in Rioja and only two in Andahuaylas had either incomplete or complete secondary education. Thus in rural communities, the academic support that friends and classmates (as well as older siblings with secondary education) can provide is especially important. This, however, does not mean that rural parents cannot offer any support to their children: moral advice and material support have been reported repeatedly and also, in the children's eyes, constitute important means of supporting their schooling. Nevertheless, parents are the first to acknowledge their limitations in supporting their children academically.

In the case of urban communities, parents' educational attainment is higher, especially in Lima 3, where most mothers have completed secondary schooling (but a couple had only completed primary school) as well as the fathers (although one did not complete secondary school and one had only completed primary school). However, working schedules may prevent parents from offering more academic support to their children because they are away most of the day). In San Roman, where most mothers also had complete or incomplete secondary education, a couple of mothers from rural background showed lower levels of schooling (none or one year only).

### 3.7 Emerging and new fears

The changes involved in social relations are also related to new fears about both teachers and classmates, especially among girls. We have seen in the story of Paola how new (female) teachers can be seen as a source of support, someone to count on in moments of difficulty and adaptation. However, girls in the Andean city showed images of (male) teachers as possible aggressors, and her (fictitious) stories on educational transitions (see methodology section for details) included sexual harassment at school. This is indeed a widespread situation in the Peruvian educational system. In 2009, 29 teachers and administrative staff from public schools were found guilty of rape during the 2007-2008 period (Peru21, 2009). However, most of the cases are not prosecuted, and many remain unknown by the authorities.

The fear of sexual harassment is also linked with the changes girls are experiencing during puberty, and this is an additional dimension to consider during their transitions. As Susan clearly states, they are not a “little girl” anymore, and in secondary school they have to be more careful since there is more interaction with grown-ups:

Everything is different ... you see, in primary school you have that warmth of being a girl with her back pack, nobody robs you, you can go calm, but in secondary school you have to take care of yourself because you are studying with older people, from fifth, fourth grade. (*Susan, urban girl, Lima 3*)

Girls' concerns also highlight the fact that in contexts such as poor urban areas, characterised by delinquency and insecurity by the children themselves, the daily journey to the secondary school is perceived as dangerous. However, the same girls also pointed out that friends can protect them from potential dangers by being with them inside and outside (walking to) the school. This reveals another dimension of the importance of peer relations as a source of safety, as we have seen above.

Boys did not express as much concern about their being objects of sexual violence (which is less frequently expressed and acknowledged by males in Peruvian society), but did confirm that the streets are dangerous because of gangs and delinquency; therefore moves to/from school may be unsafe. However, the presence of “bad companies” and gangs as a source of danger can also be found within schools, not only outside them.

It is also only among boys that bullying arises as an issue. In the Andean city of San Román for example, boys reported in a group conversation that there is a boy in their school who is abusive and keeps hitting and bullying his classmates, but who doesn't like to be hit. These boys said they hate abusive boys because they are always hitting. One of the fictitious stories they created on transition to secondary school as part of a participatory session (see methodology section for details) was about bullying, and this was the one they chose to perform. Children also reported having their own strategies (no less violent) for controlling abuse and tale-telling such as “ice age” (not talking to the boy), making fun of him, and grabbing him and hitting him against a pole (for a specific case study on violence in this site, see Rojas, forthcoming).

In general secondary school was seen as a more dangerous and violent environment than primary school, for both girls and boys, but this was especially stressed in the capital and more observable in urban sites.

Finally, discrimination issues were not especially noticeable except among indigenous girls. This does not necessarily mean that there is no discrimination against other children, but that

they did not report it. Some girls, however, gain enough confidence to acknowledge situations of discrimination. In one case, in Andahuaylas, for example, Eva reported she was discriminated against in her urban school for coming from an indigenous rural community. In the Andean city of San Roman, all girls reported they do not speak indigenous languages at secondary school, even if they know them, otherwise they will be mistreated for certain.

### 3.8 “I like secondary school more”: an overall positive assessment

Despite the changes and difficulties children encounter (or expect to encounter) when making the transition from primary to secondary school, they were looking forward to going to secondary school (when they were still in primary school) and were happy to be there once the transition had taken place.

Children ultimately prefer secondary school over primary school, showing an overall positive assessment of the process of change they have undergone. Cueto et al. 2009 also find this in a different Young Lives subsample, and it is consistent with what other studies say in relation to the transition from primary to secondary school elsewhere.

In the case of Peruvian children several reasons for this preference emerge, as shown above: the end of physical punishment in some cases, the more “advanced” level of what they study in contrast with primary school, or the perception of more freedom and autonomy associated with having different teachers and a short gap between lessons.

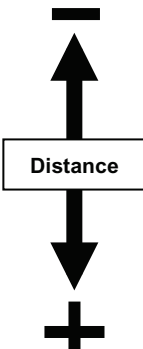
The children were aware that the changes involved in the transition to secondary school also open up the possibility of more independent action and thus more autonomy for themselves, which is particularly valued at their age and is associated with the feeling of “growing up”. Finally, children clearly identify their education as a constitutive element of their well-being, and so progressing in the educational system is also related to their present and future well-being. This is especially relevant in cases where the children are the first generation to attend secondary school or to aim to complete it. The value of this transition is then inscribed within a bigger narrative of education linked with personal and social progress, as we will see in Section 5. Before that, however, in the next section, we shift our emphasis from commonalities to differences in children’s experiences when undertaking the transition to secondary school through detailed case studies of a few of them.

## 4. Different transitions, different emphasis

Although the section above highlighted the commonalities among children and identified similar perceptions they share on their transition to secondary school, the transition from primary to secondary school is not necessarily a homogeneous experience. It happens in different ways according to the characteristics of the context, the educational services available to children, and the children themselves. This section addresses such differences through the detailed case studies of some of the children participating in this study. Figure 3 synthesises the different ways of experiencing the transition from primary to secondary school that we have identified in this study (see column A). It also shows how our case-study children are distributed between these different situations (see column B). The figure also shows, with an arrow, the greater or lesser extent of “distance” experienced by children during their

transition. Here we understand “distance” as a concept referring not only to geographical or physical space (i.e. moving far from former primary school to attend a secondary school), but also in social and cultural terms (i.e. moving to a very different social setting according to the social composition of the school or the cultural characteristics that predominate within the school population). There are students who experience little distance, what we call “closeness”, which means they move to a secondary school very close to their primary school not only in physical terms but also in terms of the type of people and culture they find there, which will be closer to what they had experienced before and to their social environment.

**Figure 3.** *Identified paths for transitions from primary to secondary school*



A		B
Transition from primary to secondary school...	#	Cases
In the same school	10	Atilio, Sandro, Marta, Alejandro, Esperanza, Fabian, Rodrigo, Esteban, Natalia, Luis
In another school but in the same town or city	10	Luz, Carmen, Aurora, Peter, Sergio, Hank, Susan, Ana, Isaura, John
In another school and in another community, village, town or city	5	María, Diana, Elmer, Eva, Álvaro
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	

The different paths that the children follow during their transitions from primary to secondary school impact on their experiences and the degree of intensity with which they perceive the different changes reported so far. We will illustrate this through our case studies and explain each one of the different situations (rows) presented in Figure 3.

#### 4.1. Moving close and with peers: the case of Luis and an effective transition

In Peru a child can go from primary to secondary school within the same school or school campus - an integrated school. This situation involves the greater “closeness”, understood as little distance in physical terms, and familiarity in social and cultural terms, because children are already familiar with the school setting, make their transition with their primary school classmates and remain in their home town. This was the case for 10 of our children, most of them from rural communities: four of them live in Andahuaylas (Atilio, Sandro, Marta, Esmeralda) and four more live in Rioja: Rodrigo, Esteban, Natalia and Luis, where there is such an integrated school.<sup>12</sup> Two other cases live in the capital city, Lima 3, and attended the same integrated school (Alejandro, Fabian).

However, schools with both primary and secondary levels are not so common. Moreover, the fact that primary and secondary schools share the same school building or campus does not imply fewer changes in their structural, organisational and cultural ways of functioning. Even if they are next to each other (as in Andahuaylas and Lima) or just a few hundred metres away (as in Rioja), they have their own and distinctive schedule, routines and ways of work. Thus for example, as we have seen in Section 3.2 and 3.3, children as Sandro and Fabian

<sup>12</sup> However, although there is one primary school and one secondary school under the same name, in practice we observed they worked as separate schools, with their own grounds, buildings, staff, and even (in the case of Andahuaylas) their own head teacher.

experienced difficulties and surprising discoveries when making their transition to secondary school even within the same school campus. Nevertheless, this “closeness” helps to lower the stress associated with transition in certain ways. This is more clearly exemplified by Luis, a 13-year-old boy in rural Rioja.

When he visited Luis for the first time he was in Grade 6 of primary school. He was an extroverted and cheerful boy, although a bit over-age because he had repeated Grade 4 in primary school. By the time he finished primary school however he had good grades, he liked studying (especially mathematics) and had many friends. He looked forward to going to secondary school but anticipated that he might feel a bit sad at the beginning: *‘when you go to first year (of secondary school) you are going to be sad, a couple of months, because you are just arriving,’* he said. However, he identified sources of support at hand: his brothers, his parents and his friends. Both his mother and his primary teacher reported not having any concerns about his adapting well. Indeed, he reported adapting to his secondary school very quickly after the transition. He had the advantage of going with his primary classmates, whom he valued a lot, *‘as they cheer your mind’* he said. He also knew older children at the secondary schools, who had previously been his classmates and were also his neighbours or relatives. So he felt that *‘everybody (at my class) was already my friend’*. He also felt prepared for the new academic demands: he did well at mathematics just as he used to do at primary school, and his secondary school teacher asked him to help his classmates in this subject, giving him confidence and pride.

Luis’ tutor in Grade 1, however, reported that Luis was a bit concerned at the beginning of the school year and was looking for support:

He said to me he was used to only one teacher, (his primary school teacher). So I said to him, ‘Ok son, but here it is not like that any more, you are going to get used to me and the other teachers’. He then told me, ‘Yes, teacher, but not all teachers are the same’. I mean, with me he is getting along very well, he asks me, he even takes note of who is misbehaving, even without being the class monitor! (*brigadier*) (*Grade 1 tutor, Rioja, School03*)

By the time of our second visit, during the second term of his first year, Luis felt at ease in his secondary school. Now he reported as positive the many changes he had experienced at his secondary school: the bigger size of the building and classrooms, the constant change of teachers, the variety among them, the better explanations of the lessons, and the free time between lessons or in free hours. He considered his secondary school to be the best in the area, a nice place and of good educational quality. His mother thought he had adapted quickly and was happy at secondary school. The tutor’s assessment of Luis adaptation to secondary school was also positive:

**Interviewer:** Have you noticed if there is anything especially difficult for Luis since he started secondary school?

**Teacher:** No, no, he has adapted very well.

**Interviewer:** And what about his academic achievement?

**Teacher:** Uh, what can I say, he is among the best ones. (*Grade 1 tutor, Rioja, School03*)

Luis liked studying and wanted to pursue higher education to avoid the hardships of agricultural work. He was already participating in some agricultural tasks and taking care of



the family cattle some days of the week during our first visit. At our second visit, however, his participation in these activities had increased in quantity and intensity, and he had started to work for wages in harvest time. However, he did not “so much” like this work because of its physical demands, and because he gets tired and sometimes hurt. Although necessary for family and individual needs (his wages were used to buy school materials for him), work is seen by Luis and his mother as complementary activity to school, and both try to ensure that work does not interfere too much with school.

In contrast to Luis, who settled in quickly and effectively, the girls we interviewed in Rioja were much less confident and far shyer when making their transition to secondary school. Even when sharing similar conditions such as physical closeness and transferring with primary school classmates, the girls were concerned with friendships and new social relations, as we saw in the story they created (see Section 3.6). They were more aware of the new classmates from neighbouring communities who were to join them in secondary school, as well as the new teachers. As we have stated at the beginning of this paper, gender is a factor that may shape differently the attitudes and expectations of children when making the transition to secondary school. This was evident also in the urban cases we studied: as we have seen, urban girls were more aware of or more concerned about the risks associated with sexual abuse and sexual harassment when making the transition to secondary school, not only within the school but also on their way to and from it.

#### **4.2. Moving to a bigger place: the case of Peter and his difficulties in adapting**

In contrast with rural children who attended the secondary school in their hometown, urban children generally experienced a bigger degree of distance in the transition to secondary school. This configures a second type of path: almost all urban children (but two) went from a small primary school, closer to their homes, to a bigger school further away from home, sometimes in the city centre, sometimes in their own district, but attended by children from other neighbourhoods. In some cases, the transition to the new secondary school takes place in a lonely way, as it was the case of Hank in San Roman and of John in Lima, reported earlier, who did not know anybody in their secondary school; in other cases, there are at least some acquaintances or friends from the neighbourhood or the primary school who go to the same school. As we have examined earlier, this is greatly valued by children when making the transition.

In the Andean city of San Roman, children had to take entry examinations to go to their preferred secondary school, and took courses to prepare themselves for the exam, adding another dimension of stress to the transition process.

Urban secondary schools are considerably bigger than secondary schools in rural areas or urban primary schools. In San Roman for example, one of the secondary schools attended by Young Lives children had about 2,500 pupils, while in Rioja, the secondary school that Luis attended had 150 pupils. Size was then a particular challenging feature for urban children, as well as the more complex social relations it entails. Indeed, urban children were more likely to stress the presence of bullying and violence not only within school but also around it (such as gangs, fights, delinquency). In such contexts, children do not always experience the transition with ease, as in the case of Peter, whose story we present below:

Peter went from a small primary school in his neighbourhood to one of the biggest secondary schools in the city, with nearly 2,500 pupils. He only knew one guy on his first day in Grade 1 since most of his primary classmates did not pass the entry exam. Although the school was only a 10-minute walk away from his home, it was really quite a different environment. Peter did not like the school very much because the building, the playground and the classrooms are dilapidated and dirty. Also, the huge number of pupils make difficult to play at the school break (*'you may get your head hit by a ball anytime,'* he said) and even in his classroom, with about 50 pupils, he felt uncomfortable, as it is not clean. However, what he disliked more about his secondary school were the teachers. He reported not only that teachers yell at pupils all the time when the pupil does not do a task or homework, but also that the teachers don't teach well and don't pay attention to the pupils. He said his teachers don't listen to him when he asks them to explain something he didn't understand, but that they are arrogant and walk away. With his classmates his relationships were not much better: he reported having bad relationships with them because they were arrogant and annoy him, and he got in constant fights with them.

Peter recognised that it has been difficult for him to adapt to the secondary school, not only when we first interviewed him in Grade 2, but also at our second visit, when he was in Grade 4.<sup>13</sup>

**Interviewer:** Do you still miss primary school?

**Peter:** Oh, yes, 99 per cent. There is always a moment (in the day) I think 'I don't want to be here'.

His mother also pointed out that he is not well adapted to secondary school; she noticed because he does not study and has a low achievement level:

**Interviewer:** Do you think Peter has adapted well in secondary school?

**Peter's mother:** Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't because if he would have adapted well, he would study well, but this little guy does not study well, (...) he comes home with 05, 08<sup>14</sup>, (...) we have to beg the teachers to let him have him another exam.

His tutor in Grade 2 also referred to Peter as a student with "academic deficiencies" and low grades. He attributed this to a lack of support from his parents, that they are not interested in their son's education *'because when a child is disapproved [failed], parents come and visit us, and ask why he is disapproved, what is the problem? But they don't come, there is no interest'.* (Grade 2 tutor, San Roman, School 01).

Our research, however, showed us a very different picture: Peter's father died years ago, and he was supported by his mother, who worked as a street food vendor (a task with which Peter helps). She does care a great deal about his schooling and works hard to provide him with an education: *'I am his support, I will sacrifice myself, I can work and can make him to study, I can work hard,'* she said. She went several times to talk to the teachers but reported being mistreated by them, that they did not bother to answer her questions about how her

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13 Only in San Román did we do a further visit in 2009.

14 Peruvian grades are from 0 to 20. Grades below 10 are fails.

son is doing. Peter's mother had only few years of primary education and found it difficult not only to give academic support to her son, but even to know if he was telling the truth when he said his homework was done. All of this seem to be unknown by the school or the teachers, and therefore no ways of offering further support to Peter are in place at institutional level.

Peter's case also highlights issues of school quality in terms of the teachers he had and the overall school environment. His opinion of his teachers was very poor; this contrasts with the experience of Luis, for example, who seemed to value his teachers and his school more. Issues of school quality have been highlighted in the studies of secondary schooling in Peru reported earlier as an area of concern and challenges.

The difficulties experienced by Peter in his transition to secondary school and throughout it have not disappeared over time. Although he was almost at the end of secondary school at the time of our second visit, he considered there was a 25 per cent of chance he would leave before completing his secondary education. He acknowledged he was not a good student:

I don't pay attention to the teacher, I get bad grades, I read at the last minute and end up disapproved... sometimes I kept watching TV instead of doing my homework. (*Peter, urban boy, San Román*)

Thus, although aware of the importance of studying and with aspirations to carry on studying after secondary schooling (he would like to be a policeman or a civil engineer), he felt also discouraged and skeptical about his educational trajectory: '*I know I will never get to enter (university) because I am not good at mathematics*'. By Grade 4, however, he had more friends and found them to be an important source of support.

### 4.3. Moving far: rural children going to unfamiliar places

If going to an urban secondary school could be hard for an urban child, we wondered how it would be for a rural one. Indeed, although most of the rural children in this study attended a secondary school in their home village, many rural children travel to another town or move there to pursue secondary schooling: even when there is almost one primary school in each rural village, there are far less secondary schools. Many rural pupils thus have to go to the secondary school in the nearest village or town, following a third, quite distinctive, path. Within the overall Young Lives sample, about one-third (32 per cent) of rural children attending secondary school during Round 2 do so outside of their village.

If, therefore, in rural communities we found most of the children in a situation of more "closeness" in their transition from primary to secondary school because they do this with their classmates and within the same community, we also found the opposite situation: namely, a greater sense of "distance", one that leads to a third possibility, in which children leave their community and home to attend school, either for part of the day or for longer periods of time. This happened to five of our case-study children, although for different reasons. We will briefly present each one of them to highlight such differences but will concentrate on one particular case.

Diana was 12 years old when we first visited her in a small village in the Upper Amazon. She started secondary school that year. She had to walk 40 minutes each day to go to secondary school in the neighbouring village (Rioja), because there is not one in her village. She walks along the *Carretera Marginal*, a busy highway connecting main towns and villages in the region. There are some public “mototaxis” that do the service, but using them everyday involves a cost which her family, like many others, cannot afford. Diana recognises the walk is long and sometimes she gets tired or arrives late at school.

Diana, like many other rural children, makes a daily trip to attend secondary school, the same one that Luis is attending. However, she does it in different conditions and feels tired frequently. At our second visit this was clearer; leading us to think it may be a possible cause of drop-out in the longer term. Another girl from Diana’s village, however, opts for a different arrangement, which involves migration and shows the use of social networks but also implies emotional costs for children and families:

María’s family lives a couple of blocks from Diana’s. They decided to send María, at age 12, to live with her grandmother in a village in another district, about two hours from home by public transport. It was a bigger village, with a secondary school, and María could live with her grandparents and walk to school in a few minutes. Her family visited her regularly, every two weeks. However, she missed her family. Thus, for the second year of secondary school, she chose to come back to her home village. When we revisited her one year later, she was commuting every day to the secondary school at the district capital, about 45 minutes on foot. It was a long walk and if she arrives late, the gatekeeper does not allow her to enter.

A similar situation occurs in Andahuaylas, the village in the Andean highlands. However in this case, it is a choice rather than a forced decision: the village does have a secondary school, and most children in the village attend it. However, villagers consider the secondary schools in the district and provincial capital to be of better quality, and thus we found one boy and one girl attending schools outside their home village.

Alvaro, who was 12 and lived in a rural village, chose to attend public secondary school in the district capital. In order to do that, he moved to a boarding house run by a former priest. He returned home only on weekends, staying in town for the whole week. On our second visit the situation remained the same and Alvaro had plans to continue living in the district capital to study, not only secondary school but also for further education. He envisaged his future as continuing to live in the city, and had no plans to return to his village.

Just like Maria, Alvaro and his family have opted for migration for study, but in the latter case they chose to do so not because of a lack of educational services (as in the case of Maria) but because of the perception of better-quality education in urban areas. Alvaro also seemed to choose a longer-term migration project than Maria. Alvaro, María and Diana faced then a situation of greater “distance”, not only physical, but also social, in their transition to secondary school. Indeed, they have had to move themselves to another location, where they have fewer chances to find acquaintances, friends or neighbours. It is probable that Diana will be joined by other classmates because they will face a similar situation to her (no secondary school in the village, but in the neighbouring one) but this is more unlikely for

María and Alvaro, who, having chosen to attend a secondary school far away from the community, have fewer chances to coincide with their former classmates. The same happens in the case of Eva, whose case we will examine in more detail.

Eva was 13 years old when we first met her and was in her second year of secondary education. She lived in a Quechua rural village with her parents and siblings. Since she started secondary school, she commuted every morning to attend school in the district capital. It takes about 30 minutes by car. Sometimes, on her way back, she had to walk, and the return trip may take about three hours if there is no public transport available. Eva reported not having any friends at school. During school breaks she played with a cousin. The reason for this, she says, is that she is marginalised by her schoolmates because she comes from a rural village. Her classmates used to call her names and call her indigenous. She said she doesn't care, she just wants to study and go [get] ahead, but she also reported mistrusting friends because they may not be loyal. Other girls in Eva's village consider her too arrogant. Even her mother said she misbehaves with local girls, showing off and trying to act superior, and refuses to speak Quechua at home. Eva doesn't use the traditional shawl local women and girls use in the village any more, but wears modern sport clothes, like the town's young people. Although Eva is aware on the one hand of the discrimination against her for being rural and indigenous, on the other hand she also discriminates against the local girls in her home village, and internalises the discourse of inferiority associated with rurality and ethnicity by refusing to wear traditional clothes and to speak her indigenous language. Thus, although resisting in one way such a discourse of inferiority through pursuing education and "going ahead", Eva also reproduces it in her relations with other girls in her village who have remained in the local school and are more attached to their indigenous traditions.

The case of Eva shows us another dimension of "distance", which is of a social and cultural nature. While María and Diana share a similar sociocultural background with their classmates (all are rural villagers, Spanish speakers, from Andean origins, but settled in the Upper Amazon) and come from (and go to) relatively homogenous rural towns, Eva is from an indigenous background, has Quechua as her mother tongue, comes from a rural village, and attends a school in an urban, district capital, where most children have Spanish as their mother tongue. The social hierarchies among indigenous and *mestizo* (mixed) populations in the Andes have been extensively documented (see, for example, De La Cadena 2000, Wilson 2000), showing the complexities in the mutual relations and labels among these groups, just as Eva's case illustrates. Indeed, the very attempt by Eva to resist discrimination but at the same time to adopt *mestizo* markers of identity (such as clothes, language and education) and to discriminate against "more indigenous" girls seems to reproduce such hierarchies among social groups. Despite the democratisation processes in Peru from the mid-20th century, several authors call attention to the ethnic and racial discrimination still in place in Peruvian society (Portocarrero 2007; Bruce 2007; Manrique 2009) and within schools (Callirgos 1995; Ames 1999; Ansión 2005), but little research has been conducted so far on these issues.

One last case showing the greatest "distance" in geographical terms is that of Elmer, who made his transition from a small multigrade primary school in Rioja to a big urban secondary school in Lima 3, where he migrated to live with his sister for one year to help her with her young children and to start secondary school. As we have seen earlier, although everything was a big change for Elmer (the size of the school, the location, the number of teachers and

subjects, etc.) the most important aid to his transition was making a new friend. When he returned to his home rural village the next year, he was happy to be reunited with his old friends.

Migration to study does not necessarily mean the family has better economic resources: it may, on the contrary, be poorer but use its social networks to access secondary school services that are perceived as better. Only Eva held a better economic position than other girls in the village (her family was in the middle wealth quintile). All the others' families were in the poorest quintile.

There is another possible course for the transition from primary to secondary school that we do not include in Figure 3, as we have no cases in this situation: drop-out, or interruption of schooling after finishing primary school. However, some children in the full Young Lives sample are yet to do this transition and, given they are over-age, this may be the case for some of them and thus we consider this as a possible situation. Also, as time passes, and family and personal circumstances may be affected by poverty in different ways, drop-out throughout secondary school could be present in future rounds of data collection.

The different paths that children follow are especially important in certain aspects of the transition experience which each child faces, as we have seen. "Closeness" may imply smoother transitions, as the case of Luis illustrates, but this will also depend on the characteristics of the child such as gender and personality, and also on the characteristics of the schools to which the children transfer. Different degrees of "distance" may imply that changes in social relationships are bigger, more demanding or difficult to handle, as in the case of Eva. The different paths children follow in their transition to high school may also lead to different trajectories: thus to migrate to bigger, urban towns from an indigenous, rural community may be the first step in a trajectory that aims at changing oneself into a urban person, to migrate permanently and to pursue higher education in the long term, while remaining in the home town may postpone or even diminish such an option.

Among the commonalities these paths share, however, it is the strong value associated with education that sustains and gives meaning to the transition to secondary school. To fully understand children's transition to secondary school in the Peruvian context it is then necessary to look into the cultural underpinnings of this process, which we address next.

## 5. The importance of education "to be somebody in life"

This section discusses the cultural background children share in relation to education and its value in their lives: their well-being, their personal and family long-term aims and the shared understandings of what to expect from it. We argue that the overall positive attitude of children making the transition to secondary school needs to be placed in a wider context and narrative to be fully understood. First of all, it is important to stress the link children themselves highlight between education and their present and future well-being, understood in broad terms. Thus for example, in a participatory group session, called the *Well-being exercise: draw and tell*, we asked children to imagine and draw a child who is doing well in

life and a child who is not doing well (see methodological section for more details). It is revealing that in all our cases the child that is doing well is going to school. When explaining their drawings, all children were explicit in stating that going to school is a very important indicator of well-being, both in urban and rural areas and for girls and boys alike. The excerpt below from one of the discussions as part of this group exercise shows that children consider education and thus the educational transition they are going through, as part of a life-course process:

All the boys comment at the same time that the boy who is doing well in life *has to be a good student*, with good grades, so he can go all the way to university (*Well-being exercise report, boys, San Román*)

Consistently, when explaining their images of a child who is not doing well in life, they depicted children who do badly at school, who do not show interest or put effort in their studies; some of them don't study and thus have to work hard for a living. According to the research participants, these hypothetical children who are not doing well in life are usually poor and may end up in gangs. To end up with none or incomplete studies is a clear sign of ill-being (understood here as not doing well in life) because these children will not have a good life and will not have qualifications to support their own family economically, according to the research participants.

With their mirror images of well-being and ill-being, the children participating in this study show they are acutely aware of, and very explicit about, the importance of education for their future. Moreover, the value attached to education seems to sustain their efforts during the transition process. Thus for example, Eva, whose case we examined above, and who is making the transition from her rural primary school to a secondary school in the district capital (where she is marginalised for being indigenous and rural), showed no signs of regret but a clear idea of what she is looking for:

**Interviewer:** Do you miss your primary school?

**Eva:** No... because I want to finish quickly my secondary school ... to be professional.

Eva therefore saw the transition process in a bigger framework: although difficult, it is just temporary and part of a desired trajectory she had chosen for herself, and she is putting all her effort into keeping going against the odds with a clear aim that may help her face the difficulties. Although Eva's case and trajectory may be particularly noticeable, the value attached to education permeates other children's narratives, including those in urban areas. For example, John, who was born in Lima, also saw this particular moment in his life in terms of its significance for his future:

**Interviewer:** In what ways does secondary school helps you in the future?

**John:** Because, when you grow up, you become somebody in life, (someone) who has a good future. (*Urban boy, Lima 3*)

For the children participating in this research, becoming somebody in life is related (indeed, almost synonymous) with higher education and professional qualifications and status:

**Interviewer:** (asking about the drawing of the child who is doing well in life) So why is he going to school?

**Child:** Because his parents want him to be something in life.

**Interviewer:** And what does it mean to be something in life?

**Child:** (to be) Professional.

*(Well-being exercise report, boys, Andahuaylas)*

Therefore, children want education to become professionals (*“profesionales”* in Spanish, referring to occupations such as teachers, doctors, nurses, lawyers, engineers, etc.), which they associate with the possibility of having a better life, as a way out of poverty. The value of education is therefore linked with life course aims and with desired trajectories; thus children stressed, in three of the four sites, the importance not only of enrolment and attendance, but also of good performance at school (so as to guarantee a successful educational career).

Schools contribute to this point of view, with teachers stressing the importance of becoming professionals (see, for example, Rojas and Portugal 2010). However, this is not necessarily an external imposition from school on children and their families: the children's parents also stressed the importance of education for their children to be “more”, to escape suffering in the fields and poverty in general, as Eva's mother explains:

**Eva's mother:** I want Eva to study, to become professional, to pay attention.

**Interviewer:** Why do you want her to become professional?

**Eva's mother:** If she is not a professional, what money would she have? She will suffer then, if she works (as professional) each month she will earn (money).

In the same way, when Luis entered secondary school, her mother interpreted this in broader terms beyond the particular moment of the transition:

**Interviewer:** Do you think secondary school is a positive or negative change (for your son)?

**Luis's mother:** It is positive, sure, it is a change of life; he has hopes to be something in life.

In both of these cases, the mothers had had only some years of primary education, and work in their homes and on their land. They aspired for their children to complete their secondary education and pursue higher education or other occupations beyond agricultural work. Urban parents also wanted their children to study and become professionals, as Peter's mother declared:

**Interviewer:** Would you like he continue studying after secondary school or stop there?

**Peter's mother:** I want him to finish his secondary school and then go to higher education.

**Interviewer:** Would you prefer the university or (vocational training) institute?

**Peter's mother:** (I'd prefer) university if he gets in, if he does not get in, we have already talked: 'if you do not enter into the university, in any institute (you will go) or in something else will you work' (...) I can work hard to pay for the things he will need at the university, it is a bit expensive, then I have (to work).

In summary, the narrative children showed is obviously supported at home, as well as at school. Other studies have highlighted the strong value of education for urban and rural families in Peru (Ansi3n 1989; Ansi3n et al. 1998; Ames 2002; Benavides et al. 2006;



Montoya 1990; Degregori 1986), and the results presented here show this value continues to drive personal and family goals. This does not mean however that these projects are not problematic. Different circumstances may prevent the achievement of the desired trajectories, and parents were aware of them. Among those most often mentioned were: poverty or lack of economic resources to keep children studying; health issues affecting one or both parents (or the child), which increase the need to involve children in paid work; lack of educational services within a reachable distance (considering the family's limited resources); or difficulties in entering higher education institutions. To overcome these obstacles, parents and children consider that children may need to work after secondary schooling in order to afford further education. In fact, many children have already started to work in order to contribute to the family's survival. In addition, some parents, especially those whose children showed difficulties in adapting to secondary schooling, identify individual circumstances and children's will and characteristics, that may work against the desired educational trajectory, as Peter's mother explained most clearly:

**Interviewer:** Do you think Peter is going to achieve further education as you wish?

**Peter's mother:** Sometimes I tell him, and he says to me 'yes mom, I am going to study'. Sometimes I think and feel discouraged because he does not study well at school, then I think perhaps he is not going to study (post-secondary education)?

In urban sites children stressed that, ideally, education should be the main activity of children, although they were aware that household circumstances and poverty may affect the children's commitment to their schooling. In fact, some children were already working in a family business for part of the day or during weekends alongside their schooling. However, school attendance was their priority and they did not report missing classes to work. Working and schooling were seen as complementary activities as long as the first does not interfere too much with the second.

In rural sites children were even more fully involved in other activities besides schooling, such as paid and non-paid agricultural and domestic work inside and outside the household. However, in these communities, the expectation of a radical change through education is stronger because it means an end to working in the fields as a peasant and all the hard work, suffering and poverty this implies, according to the children (and their parents). The image of a professional is the promise of a completely different life and identity. Pursuing the promise of education itself implies for rural children some changes from the outset, such as for example, migration: children not only migrate to access secondary school (in some cases) or higher education (in all cases), but also to develop themselves as professionals (the issue of migration and education is more fully explored in Crivello 2009; see also Lockley, Altamirano and Copestake 2008).

The change in lifestyle is also radical for rural children, especially considering the low educational level their caregivers had reached. Most of the rural children we interviewed, just by being at the beginning of their secondary schooling, were already outperforming their parents' educational level. This, however, does not translate into bad attitudes towards parents. On the contrary, rural children were especially aware of the sacrifices their parents were making to give them education, and felt they should respond to that.

By expressing this need to respond to their parents' sacrifice, rural children show, on the one hand, a strong intergenerational communication and agreement with the importance of education as part of individual and family projects. On the other hand, they reveal a shared framework and a cultural understanding about the functioning of social relationships, including

family relations, based on reciprocity as the cornerstone of social life. All of this is particularly visible in the story that rural girls in Andahuaylas created and performed for us. The story was part of a participatory session on educational transitions in which we offered a vignette (in italics below) from which the group continued a story (see methodology section).<sup>15</sup>

*Juliana is a girl who is in the sixth grade of primary school. She likes to study but her parents had told her that she would not continue studying after finishing primary school because they needed help at home. Juliana decided to talk to... her teacher.*

**Scene 1: Juliana and her teacher**

**Juliana:** Good morning teacher. Teacher, my parents don't want me to study anymore. Please, can you give me some advice?

**Teacher:** Look, Juliana, you have to study and be something in life, because your parents suffer a lot working in the fields. When you become professional you will help them so they stop suffering in the fields, and will support your family.

**Juliana:** But my father doesn't want me to study, teacher.

**Teacher:** Talk to them nicely and tell him you want to study to become somebody in life and to help them so they will stop suffering in the fields.

**Juliana:** Thank you miss.

**Scene 2: Juliana, her father and mother**

**Juliana:** Dad, I want to talk to you. The teacher told me to study, because I want to be something in life.

**Father:** No, it is not possible, because you have to work at the fields and take care of your little siblings.

**Juliana:** (sobbing) No dad, please, I want to study to be something in life, please dad, please, I am asking you.

**Mother** (taking the father away): Look, our daughter is crying. Let's tell her she shall continue studying, and help us and thus we will not be suffering on the farm.

**Father:** Ok.

**Mother** (coming back to Juliana with the father): Juliana, we have decided you will continue studying so you will become somebody in life. We will let you study to become professional which will help us, because we suffer on the farm from working hard, and your younger siblings as well.

**Juliana:** Thank you dad! Thank you!! (smiling and hugging them)

Epilogue (from the written story): In the end, Juliana finished secondary school, went to university and became a great professional. Her mother no longer worked on the farm because Juliana was the one who worked and supported her family. Juliana's father was very happy because his daughter had achieved her aim of becoming a great professional. (Group session with girls on educational transitions, Andahuaylas)

<sup>15</sup> The performance was videotaped with the children's consent. The box shows the transcription of the tape.

The story of Juliana captures not only the verbatim words of girls and their constant use of expressions such as “to be somebody” or “something in life”, but also the negotiations children may have to face within their households when pressing needs may menace their educational careers. The position and characteristics of each child and the structure of the family are also important factors: Juliana is a girl and the oldest sibling, and thus her help in caring for younger siblings as well as for working on the farm is greatly valued. The story also reveals that within the negotiations children may face, they actively look for allies, such as the teacher in this story (or an uncle or aunt in another one). Finally, the story reminds us once again that children are social actors participating in specific cultures which value the individual educational trajectory in different ways: in the case of Juliana, she negotiates a personal aim within a family strategy that considers the well-being of the family group and not only of individuals on their own: mutual commitments are established, a sense of reciprocity is shared, and intergenerational caring is promised (for older parents as well as younger-siblings).

Therefore, it is within the social worlds they inhabit that children struggle to make sense of their transition to secondary school and of the challenges and opportunities it opens up to them. But it is also through the cultural repertoire which children have that they may find the strength and the determination to overcome the odds and go through this transition with an overall positive outcome.

## Summary and discussion

The children we interviewed went through the transition from primary to secondary at different moments: some before our first visit, some during our first visit and some between our first and second visit. All of them were able to point out a series of changes they experienced between primary and secondary education, changes that have been broadly organised around school or institutional issues and social (mainly peer) relationships.

Changes at school level were related to curriculum content (new things to learn, new subjects to take), which are usually characterised as more difficult; and with school organisation and teaching styles, since there are more teachers, each in charge of different subjects and teaching a particular class for only a few hours each week. Teachers in secondary school, in contrast to primary school teachers, seem to be more detached because they show less interest in children, and are not so much “behind them” (they have to teach several subjects and grades during the week). This also implies a difference between what is expected from the pupil and his/her behaviour: more independence and greater responsibility for their studying and learning is demanded, as the children themselves point out. This may be interpreted as an opportunity but also as a challenge. Although some children may feel nostalgic about the more personal style in primary school, most children see this change as a positive one because they gain independence and “freedom”. Studying in secondary school also demands more time, not only during the school day but also after school when doing homework. It involves greater effort too, since, as explained, subjects are more difficult.

Changes at the level of social relationships are closely related to the type of transfer children had. Children either went to a secondary school that is integrated to or independent from their primary school, but in both cases they move to a new building, sometimes close to and sometimes far away from their primary school. However, the most important distinction is that,

while some children went along with their primary school classmates (in some rural areas, for example), others went into a new class with no familiar faces (some rural children who go to the school in the next village or the nearby city and most urban children). Therefore this new experience also involved new classmates. The importance of peers was highlighted by the children themselves as a key factor in easing their adaptation to the new school.

Indeed, peer relationships seem to be central to children's educational transition. Both girls and boys mentioned that the most important help in adapting to secondary school comes from friends and classmates. Peers support each other with companionship, advice and help with homework, thus offering both emotional and academic support. Not having friends, therefore, is seen as an important difficulty, which can be greater for the children in urban areas in bigger schools and the rural children that go to urban schools or schools in other villages. Bad relationships with peers (namely, bullying) are also a possibility, especially in large urban schools, and they imply a major threat for a successful adaptation. Children also express concern about the presence of "bad companies" and gangs, as well as fights.

Children were aware of the stress associated with the transition from primary to secondary school and some reported having difficulties adapting at the beginning. They acknowledged that negative information or rough teachers may scare them, and that lack of peer support may make things more difficult. However, most of the children we interviewed showed an overall optimistic attitude when stating that, in the end, they get used to secondary school, overcome any difficulties and trust they will continue to the very end of secondary school.

We examined different transitions among research participants and highlighted how they marked children's experiences in different ways. By closely looking at some case studies we point out the differences (not just the commonalities) and what they tell us about the transition. Thus for example, we examined various degrees of "distance", showing how closeness in social, cultural and geographical terms may help to ease the transition, while distance and difference (both cultural and social) may make the process a more difficult one. The cases we examined also point out the existence of many differences among schools, from school culture, size, location and population, to educational quality, which makes the experience of transition a heterogeneous one: despite the many similarities among schools, transition is not lived in the exactly same way in different locations and by different children.

However, despite the various experiences examined, the value attached to education arises prominently in all of them. Although there are challenges and fears to be found in the transition to secondary school, children value the transition extremely highly. We have argued that this is in turn related within a bigger narrative of education linked to personal and social progress. The strong value attached to education has been highlighted by other studies in Peruvian social sciences (Ansión 1989; Montoya 1990; Ansión et al. 1998; Ames 2002) as well as within the Young Lives project (Crivello 2009; Rojas and Portugal 2010). In this paper, however, we focused on a specific and critical moment in children's life-course - the transition from primary to secondary school. By paying close attention to the narratives children build around their own transitions, it is possible to identify not only the stresses, challenges and opportunities that this transition entails, but also how children place this moment within a "bigger picture" including their present and future well-being, as well as their expectations of progress in life.

The study has also revealed once again that children are social actors who need to negotiate their personal and family aims in culturally specific ways. This in turn highlights the importance of taking into account the social and cultural context in which children's transitions take place in order to understand better their needs and concerns and respond to them.

However, the educational system in which these children moves seems not to pay attention to the social context of children or the transition itself. Neither formal nor informal transition support programmes are available for children and their families. However, as other studies have shown, the transition to secondary school has long-term consequences for children's educational trajectories (Gimeno Sacristan 1997; West et al. 2010).

In the absence of either formal or informal procedures to facilitate transition to secondary school, we have argued that it is thanks to the cultural repertoire children have that they make sense of and go through this educational transition. This repertoire and the values that sustain it are especially important in the context of this study, in which several problems arise, such as the beginning of a working life that may compete for children's time, the little institutional support available for this particular transition, and the overall problems of educational quality yet to be solved.

## Conclusion and policy implications

The changes identified by Peruvian pupils participating in this research show many similarities with those reported by pupils in other, more developed, countries. This testifies to the growing standardisation of educational systems around the world. However, there are also important differences in terms of school structures, support programmes and, more importantly, life trajectories and cultural repertoires of children who may be the first generation to attend secondary school. Differences also appear within the group, reminding us of the individual nature of the experience.

There are also broader contextual problems which are not unique to Peru but are shared by other developing countries, such as the low rate of completion of secondary schooling, especially in rural areas and among the poorest. When reviewing the literature on transitions to secondary school for developed countries, one issue that arose was how the research responded or was linked to the growing concern to offer more support at institutional level to ease the transition to secondary school. With increasing evidence that the transition to secondary school has long-term effects on educational trajectories and outcomes, the need for such programmes becomes more apparent. If Peruvian children making the transition to secondary school were to receive support in coping with such transitions, it may be possible to foster more successful transitions. This in turn will imply a better adaptation to secondary school which should be translated into better performance and outcomes, including completion of secondary school.

Educational policies thus need to consider activities and programmes to foster the flux of information before and after the transition period, so as to build familiarity with the new environment, and to strengthen the continuity across settings. There are several strategies which may be of help in easing the transition by enabling children to get to know in advance the physical and social context of a new school. These type of activities have been implemented in other countries in Europe, North America and Australia since the 1980s and include, for example, organised visits to the secondary school in advance, getting to know future teachers and/or pupils, matching older and younger pupils, providing information leaflets or inviting graduates from primary school to share about their experiences in secondary school, etc (see Howard and Johnson 2004; Evangelou et al. 2008).

More importantly, schools should ensure children are offered adequate opportunities to develop the personal skills and abilities, both *academic* and *social*, that they will need to cope with the type of changes that the transition to secondary school involves. A stronger sense of confidence and control over the changes that affect them may be of greater help for children making the transition to secondary school, in a way that stress can be better managed and autonomy better developed, especially considering the concerns they express about social relations.

In offering institutional support it is necessary not to overlook the important support that children find in their homes and communities, and to understand its distinctiveness from support with the academic demands of school (such as helping children with homework). The support children get in their homes and communities is more cultural and moral in nature, but strengthens their will and sense of purpose for the future in terms of the family and personal aims that they envisage achieving through/with education.

Indeed, the children's aspirations are ambitious, considering the context of poverty in which most of them live. Schools may not be prepared for such high aspirations, as Davila and Guiardo (2005) indicate in the case of young people of low socioeconomic status in Chile. Or economic constraints may prevail over desires, as parents fear. But it may also be that the young children in this study seize the opportunity they envisage from going through secondary education, a journey they have just started, and show us surprising educational trajectories. The longitudinal nature of the Young Lives study and the future rounds of data collection will provide us with an opportunity to answer such questions.

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# Appendix: Vignettes used in the Educational Transitions exercise

## ***Vignette 1 Girls***

Juliana is a girl who is in sixth grade of primary school. She likes to study but her parents have told her that she would not continue studying after finishing primary school because they need help at home. Juliana decided to talk to...

## ***Vignette 2 Boys***

Juan is in sixth grade of primary school, and he will soon finish school and begin secondary school. But the secondary school is far away and he is worried. Furthermore, his teachers have told him many things about secondary school, for example that...

## ***Vignette 3 Girls***

Paola has just started first grade of secondary school. She feels strange because she has new teachers, new classmates, more courses and in a new school. Sometimes she feels good because... Sometimes she feels bad because...

\*Vignettes were the same for boys and girls, only the name was changed to match the sex of the character with that of the group (boy for boys, girl for girls)









**Young Lives is an innovative long-term international research project investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty.**

The project seeks to:

- improve understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty and to examine how policies affect children's well-being
- inform the development and implementation of future policies and practices that will reduce childhood poverty.

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Young Lives is coordinated by a small team based at the University of Oxford, led by Jo Boyden.

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Department of International Development,  
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Save the Children UK  
(staff in the Policy Department in London  
and programme staff in Ethiopia).



**Young Lives**   
An International Study of Childhood Poverty

Department of International Development  
University of Oxford  
3 Mansfield Road, Oxford OX1 3TB, UK  
Tel: +44 (0)1865 281751  
Fax: +44 (0)1865 281801  
Email: [younglives@younglives.org.uk](mailto:younglives@younglives.org.uk)

[www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk)