CESAME:

Culturally Engaged and Sensitive Approaches
to Mental health Education

February 2022

CESAME is a research collaboration between:

THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART   DE MONTFORT UNIVERSITY LEICESTER   Centre for Mental Health   LEADERS UNLOCKED

TRIUMPH   UKRI UK Research and Innovation   UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

Project Summary →

CESAME: CULTURALLY ENGAGED AND SENSITIVE APPROACHES TO MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

The project employed a participatory design approach to map the experiences of young people from ethnically diverse groups during their transition from primary to secondary school, with the aim to:

- Understand what mental health support young people from these groups need and aspire to during this transition
- Identify opportunities to improve ways of supporting young people during this transition
- Develop ideas and recommendations for culturally sensitive support for young people from ethnically diverse groups in the future

Research team:
Sneha Raman
Andrea Taylor
Emily Cunningham
Nadzeya Svirydzenka
Kadra Abdinasir
Raghu Raghavan

Peer researcher:
1
Abdul Moiz Siddiqi (17 yrs)*
*Documented age at project start.

Participants:
7
Young people (2x14 yrs, 3x15 yrs and 2x16 yrs)* from ethnically diverse groups

Enhancing primary to secondary school transition and mental health experiences of young people from ethnically diverse groups.

4 Workshops with young people

12 Hours Workshop Time

3 Hours Pre-workshop Tasks

2020-2022

Methods:

- Collaborative knowledge mapping
- Lived experience mapping: visual stories
- Co-designing ideas for future transition
- Collaborative analysis

Participatory methods and collaborative workshops were adapted to enable remote engagement due to Covid-19 restrictions and facilitated using video conferencing (Zoom) and a virtual whiteboard (Miro).

Outputs:

Visual lived experience stories x7

Future transition experience map x1

Summary report x1

School transition

Ethnic identity

Mental health

## Implications of key findings for:
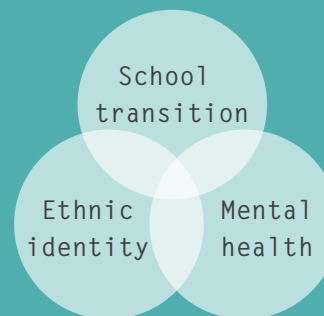
SCHOOLS - longer transition period, peer-to-peer support, promoting ethnic and cultural inclusion through curriculum, and fostering a sensitive, supportive and equitable learning environment.

RESEARCH - diverse and inclusive approaches, foregrounding lived experiences, promoting heterogeneity, considering intersectionality, and integrating perspectives of school staff.

POLICY - whole school approach, embedding cultural education and inclusion, creating enabling environment for schools to enact changes through policy frameworks and allocation of resources.
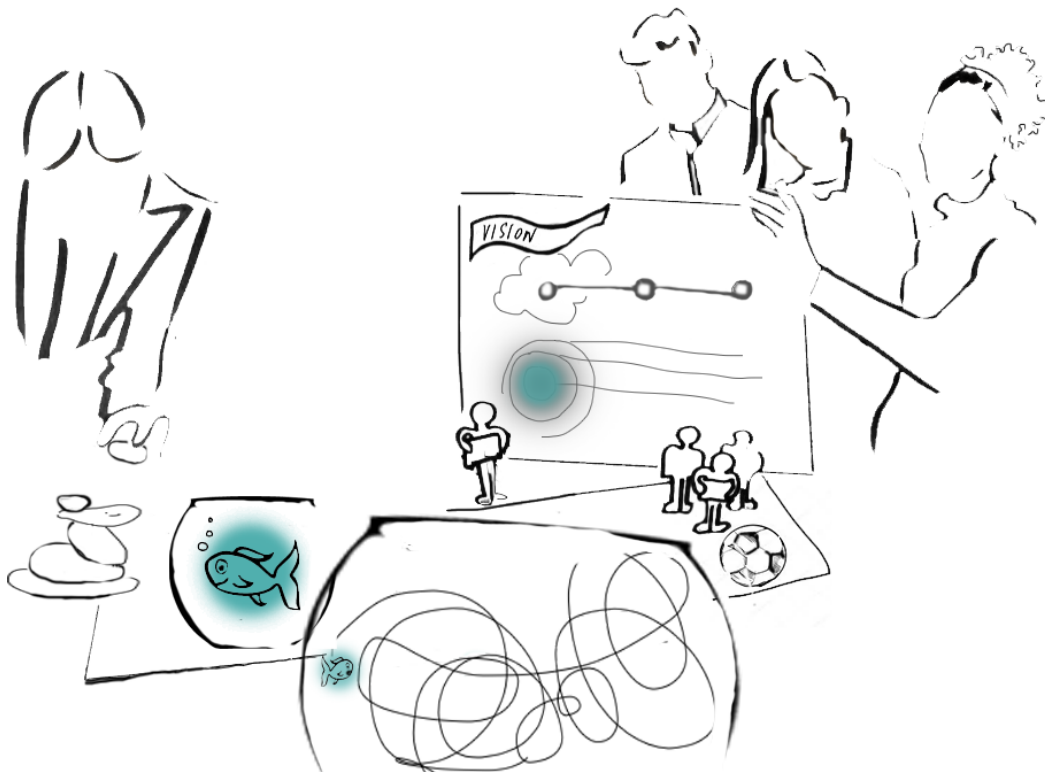
Background

The project is a collaboration between the Glasgow School of Art (GSA), De Montford University, Centre for Mental Health, and Leaders Unlocked, using a participatory design approach to work with young people from ethnically diverse groups*.

Transition from primary to secondary school can be exciting, but it can also be a stressful experience for young people and can have a negative impact on their mental health. Young people from ethnically diverse groups may be particularly poorly supported in the transition process, and we have very little knowledge of their transition experiences. A participatory design approach enables understanding by focusing on their lived experience to create rich insights and opportunities for co-designing future experiences.

*Young people from ethnically diverse groups: A note on language
The research team believe that, where possible, it is good to be specific about the ethnic group or identity rather than using umbrella terms such as 'BAME'. The participants in this project belong to multiple ethnic groups that are minoritised, and when discussing their lived experience highlighted a need to focus on diversity. The team built on this to adopt the language used in this report when referring to participants as 'young people from ethnically diverse groups'.

Aim

The overall aim was **to map the experiences of young people from ethnically diverse groups (hereinafter, young people) during their transition from primary to secondary school.** The main objectives were to:

→ **Understand what mental health support young people need and aspire to during this transition**

→ **Identify opportunities to improve approaches to supporting young people's mental health in schools during this transition**

→ **Develop ideas and recommendations for culturally sensitive support for young people.**

This work fills a crucial gap in current knowledge and approaches to research, policy and practice across the UK that builds on lived experiences of young people from ethnically diverse groups, explicitly focusing at the intersection of ethnic identity, school transition and mental health.

What We Did

Understanding current context and perceptions
Understanding current context and perceptions of mental health and mental health support for young people from ethnically diverse groups during school transitions through knowledge exchange sessions, a rapid literature review and a collaborative workshop with young people.

Mapping participants' lived experiences
Visually capturing young people's individual experiences of transition from primary to secondary school, ethnic and cultural identity, and mental health using a design pack and through a collaborative workshop with young people to collectively identify emerging insights and themes.

Identifying key issues and opportunities
Identifying key issues and opportunities for designing concepts for culturally sensitive approaches to support future experiences of transition from primary to secondary school for young people from ethnically diverse groups through a collaborative workshop with young people.

Mapping future experiences of transition
Iterating and prioritising concepts and developing recommendations for culturally sensitive approaches to support future experiences of transition from primary to secondary school for young people from ethnically diverse groups through a collaborative workshop with young people.

Collaborative analysis and synthesis of themes and concepts
A collaborative and iterative approach involving the multi-disciplinary expertise of the research team supported thematic analysis of emerging findings at the end of each stage of the process and synthesis of the design concepts. The emerging themes and directions were reviewed with participants during each workshop to ensure that they accurately represented young people's lived experience and voice.

Disseminating findings and discussing implications
The dissemination event aimed to initiate further dialogue with the wider community of policy makers, school staff and leaders, practitioners working in and around schools, and researchers on the implications of findings from this work for policy, practice and research in the future.

Key Insights and Opportunities

The importance of having **language** to talk about mental health was highlighted. Some of the participants used metaphors such as 'balancing stones' and 'aged wooden door' and the examples of film 'Inside Out' to better articulate their perceptions on mental health. Participants also highlighted that attempts by schools to raise **awareness** around mental health issues can sometimes come across as tokenistic if they don't reflect the lived experience of the young people. Most participants found the transition period between primary to secondary school and beginning of secondary school challenging, and '**feeling different**' and '**feeling isolated**' were the two key themes that emerged. Experiences of **mental health issues** appeared to coincide with these stages - anxiety, eating disorders, panic attacks, depression and poor body-image were highlighted by participants. **Stereotypes around mental health and ethnicity** were also highlighted as problematic, for example, being Black being seen as 'strong' or home life assumed as 'perfect' because it was seen as unusual for people of some cultural or religious backgrounds to get divorced. Most participants also mentioned a period of **uncertainty and confusion around expressing their ethnic and cultural identities** in schools that had less diversity. Participants also shared direct and indirect **experiences of racism**, and **uncomfortable situations** where they felt it was easier to lie about their ethnic or cultural background rather than sharing something personal that could potentially prompt more invasive questions from teachers or peers (e.g., mentioning food or religious practices that may not be familiar to others).

In response to these, participants developed a number of ideas for positive transition experiences in the future. Key themes included: supporting a **longer transition period**, preparing students and enforcing ethos on **diversity**, enabling **education on ethnicity and culture**, **breaking stereotypes**, enabling **mutual learning** amongst staff and students, and enabling an **open and caring environment** to support mental health.

To view a higher resolution of the future experiences map below, and visual stories capturing lived experiences and key challenges highlighted by participants, please visit: **www.futurehealthandwellbeing.org/cesame**

Future experiences map capturing ideas for positive transitions from primary to secondary school (Image credit: Sneha Raman, 2022)
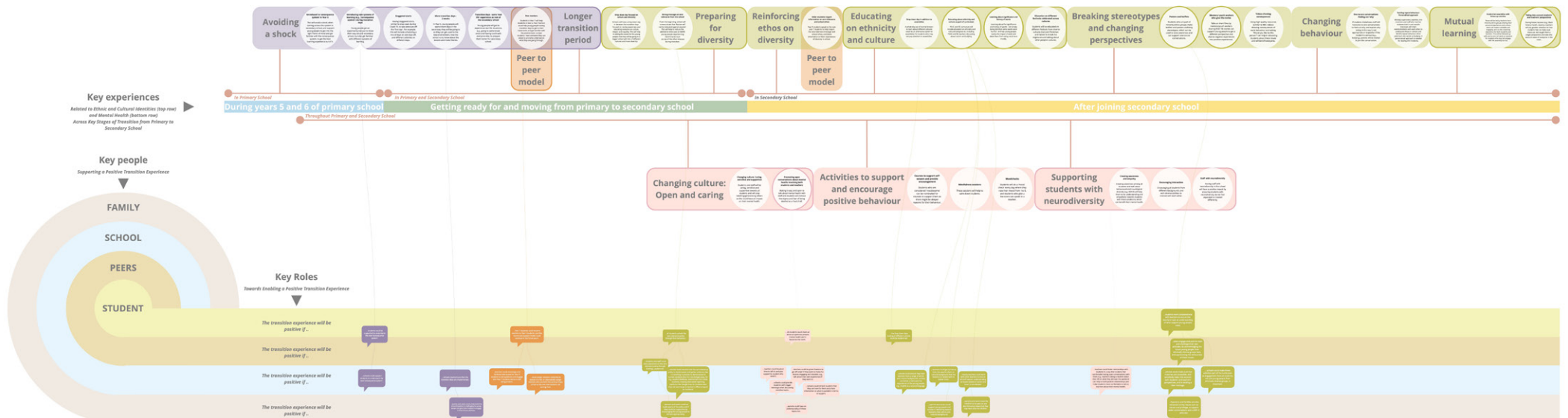
Implications for Schools

Building on key themes and concepts, the following outlines implications of the findings for schools:

→ **Primary and secondary schools should explore ways to enable a longer transition period for students entering first year of secondary school, considering diverse and intersecting needs.**

A longer transition period will develop a sense of familiarity, encourage social relationships, and facilitate feelings of predictability and safety when moving into a new environment. These will encourage identity exploration, connections, and reduced anxiety when transferring schools and having to reassert personal, social, and relationship identities for new students.

Participants described positive experiences associated with longer transition periods, which allowed them to get used to the school environment and the different way of doing things. They suggested that it's important for all students entering secondary school to be given time to understand new, potentially stricter consequence systems and a staggered introduction to sharing break and lunchtime with older students. It was also suggested that schools work to support young people to engage in social and leisure activities in the school to make new friends and ease stress. Schools should also recognise that students with emotional needs and neurodiversity may require tailored support during the transition process and ensure that is implemented in an inclusive way to not make them feel different or isolated from their peers.

→ **Secondary schools should facilitate a peer-to-peer mentor scheme, where older students can support students beginning secondary school in their transition.**

Meaningful mentoring relationships with peers with inside knowledge of school systems and culture, will allow informal learning for new students and facilitate a sense of belonging and support crucial for mental health. Students of shared cultural background can provide insight into navigating cultural rights and representation in a school context.

Participants suggested that peer-to-peer mentor schemes would give new students beginning secondary school the opportunity to ask older students for advice on how to acclimatise to the school environment. To ensure fairness, new students could choose for school staff to allocate mentors randomly or through a system where the mentors and mentees came from the same primary school. They also suggested that opportunities should be given for these new students to speak to older mentors in private away from teachers, to make younger students feel they have a safe space to ask questions.

→ **Primary and secondary schools should actively promote ethnic and cultural inclusion through the curriculum and other engaging activities. As part of this, schools should identify ways to involve parents and carers.**

Cultural inclusivity and a sense of belonging for mental health of new and older students needs to be reflected in whole school systems, curriculum, activities, and teaching practice. Norms and attitudes around cultural inclusion need to be shaped in classroom and across peer and teacher/student relationships.

Participants described experiences at secondary school where school systems or other students had made them feel different or isolated by asking questions about their ethnic or cultural identity or religious practices. Participants suggested that improving education overall in schools on ethnic and cultural diversity could help address this and ensure both staff and

students are invested in creating a more inclusive environment for students from ethnically diverse groups. Participants felt that schools should take an active and meaningful approach to encouraging education on ethnicity and culture, making time for 'drop-down' days (i.e., days dedicated to activities, lessons and assemblies on a specific ethnicity, culture or religious practice), encouraging families to engage with these events, and inviting individuals with the relevant ethnic, cultural or religious background to speak about their experiences to students.

A collaborative and whole-school approach should be taken to ethnic and cultural inclusion, where staff, students and families are encouraged to learn and participate in planning and delivering activities. This would make learning more interesting and applicable, and cultivate an environment of inclusion where the principles of respect and understanding are practised and taken seriously by students.

→ **Primary and secondary schools should foster a sensitive, supportive and equitable learning environment where students and staff can have open conversations around mental health.**

Inclusive language and understanding of cultural aspects of mental health literacy needs to be integrated in teaching and pastoral care.

Participants felt that schools could do more to encourage a safe and supportive environment for students to talk about and seek help for their mental health. Schools should take a whole-school approach to mental health, including supporting staff to share their experiences (if they want to) to make lessons around mental health more relatable for students. Lessons and assemblies around mental health should be delivered sensitively, and time made for students to speak to staff about their experiences if they need to.

Implications for Research

The following outlines implications of the findings for future research. It includes research gaps identified in the literature review, points raised by participants which were outside the remit of this work but nevertheless important findings.

→ More research using **diverse approaches** is needed on the mental health experiences of students from ethnically diverse groups, with an emphasis on **participatory methods and peer research**.

→ Research and research methodology should focus on **distinct ethnic groups** rather than homogenising all ethnically diverse groups into one, including ways of improving data collection that represents heterogenity.

→ Researchers need to identify and address barriers to participation, and follow **inclusive approaches** for recruitment and engagement with diverse cultural communities that promote learning and respect heterogeneity.

→ Research needs to focus on how **social transition** from primary to secondary school impact the **identity development** of students from ethnically and culturally diverse groups.

→ Research needs to focus on the experiences of **neurodiverse students from ethnically diverse groups** during the transition from primary to secondary school.

→ Research needs to focus on **school staff's perspectives** on how well primary and secondary schools support students from ethnically diverse groups during transition from primary to secondary school.

→ Research needs to focus on how **interdisciplinary knowledge exchange** can be integrated in children and young people's mental health research.

Implications for Policy

Building on the findings, the following questions have been identified as key for policy considerations in the future:

→ How can the learnings from CESAME be incorporated into a **whole school approach to mental health**?

→ How can **cultural education and inclusion** be better embedded in both primary and secondary schools?

→ What potential barriers might schools face in **delivering on the changes** proposed by CESAME? What could governments across the UK do to better support them?

→ The Covid-19 pandemic has made transitions between educational settings even more challenging and evidence suggests that students from ethnically diverse backgrounds have been disproportionately impacted by the effects of the pandemic. Do **education recovery plans** sufficiently recognise this? What more can be done?

→ What can we do to ensure a smoother transition for **young people from ethnically diverse groups with additional learning needs**, such as those with neurodiverse conditions or learning disabilities?

Conclusion

CESAME set out to explore and fill a crucial gap in current knowledge and approaches to research, policy and practice that builds on lived experiences of young people from ethnically diverse groups. CESAME explicitly focuses at the intersection of ethnic identity, school transition and mental health. The project employed a participatory design approach to collaborate with young people from ethnically diverse groups. A number of key insights and ideas have emerged. However, there are limitations due to the exploratory nature of this work in directly translating these ideas into action. There is opportunity for further work involving young people from ethnically diverse groups across the UK, and collaborating with schools, practitioners and policy makers to co-design concepts for the future and roadmap pathways to implementation.

Further Information

Visit: **futurehealthandwellbeing.org/cesame**

Contact: Sneha Raman
s.raman@gsa.ac.uk

Research Team

Sneha Raman
The Glasgow School of Art

Andrea Taylor
The Glasgow School of Art

Abdul Moiz Siddiqi
Peer Researcher, Leaders Unlocked

Emily Cunningham
University of Glasgow

Nadzeya Svirydzenka
De Montfort University

Kadra Abdinasir
Centre for Mental Health

Raghu Raghavan
De Montfort University

Thank You