EDITORIAL

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This second edition of the *International Journal of Transitions in Childhood* presents research and ideas about transitions in the United Kingdom, Germany and Australia. The diversity and complexity of transition needs to be valued and understood in supporting children’s development, wellbeing and progress through school.

Adjustment to school does not happen in isolation and is supported by the participation and interaction of children, families, schools and communities (Dockett & Perry, 2001). Interactions and relationships are a critical part of successful transition programs and impact significantly on children’s sense of belonging, acceptance within a school community and their learning (Fabian, 2000). As noted by both Bronfenbrenner (1986) and Erikson (1963), it is the mismatches between children's development and experiences, and the challenges of the new situation that have the power to create disconnections and impact their transition to school. Therefore in seeking to facilitate a smooth transition and minimise difficulties for children and their families, collaboration and systematic, individualised, and timely planning is critical (Margetts, 2002).

A key step in this process is to identify what key stakeholders believe about transition, and it is from this premise that Mary O’Kane and Nóirín Hayes, and Bulkeley and Fabian have conducted their research. O’Kane and Hayes in seeking to understand transition in the Irish context, present the similarities and differences in the perspectives of preschool and junior infant class teachers from a nation-wide survey. Most frequently teachers agreed that children with low-self esteem, difficulty listening or concentrating, and those with behaviour problems were most at risk. Teachers were also asked to identify the skills that they felt children needed for a successful transition to school and strategies for supporting these skills.

Social and emotional well-being and belonging during transitions are important, with self-assured children more likely to conform to the challenges and demands of the new setting, and to benefit academically (Featherstone, 2004; Goleman, 1996). Jane Bulkeley and Hilary Fabian investigated these issues and compared transitions into Reception and Year 1 in a rural school in England. Information was obtained from teachers and classroom observations about how transitions are managed and aspects of the physical learning environments. Using a case study approach the parents of 10 children, some of whom had made an initial good adjustment and others who had not, were interviewed. Familiarity with the culture and school environment appears to be a key in the children’s sense of well-being and belonging.

Wilfried Griebel and Dagmar Berwanger align successful transition to the process of coping. They propose an approach for understanding the stresses and demands of the transition from primary to secondary school for both children and parents, again with a focus on shared understanding and action. They identify challenges at three different levels: personal, interactional, and contextual. They outline a Transition Model in which challenges and strategies for coping are integrated. Roles of students, parents and teachers are not specified but recognized as being able to be adopted by anyone, and negotiable.

Challenges during transitions involve the physical setting, curriculum continuity, communication between the context from which the transition is being made and the new setting, and the preparation of students and families for the transition (Margetts, 1997). Issues
raised by O’Kane and Hayes relate to junior infant class sizes, child:staff ratios and
communication between preschool and school. These issues are also reflected by Bulkeley
and Fabian who note that even within schools, communication between teachers at different
year levels is needed, and

The practitioner article by Tracey Kirk-Downey and Bob Perry describes the development
and implementation of the Illawarra Transition to School Project in a large regional city of
New South Wales, Australia. This large community project has been implemented to support
the transition to school for parents and children. A wide range of strategies are reported with
highlights including a starting school brochure, Big School Parent Expos, mascot competition,
starting school picnics in the park and transition website.

The complexity of transitions has been identified and a number of issues have been raised for
further investigation. The challenge for educators is to apply research to practice and to
overcome the constraints created by lack of time and resources.

References


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