



UNDERSTANDING **SCHOOL TRANSITION**

WHAT HAPPENS TO CHILDREN AND HOW TO HELP THEM

JENNIFER SYMONDS

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Chapter Abstracts

Ch. 1 School transition as a status passage

When 10-14 year old children change schools, they *become* a secondary, middle or junior high school student. There, they master new skills such as commuting to school alone and managing their own school equipment, which involve increased personal responsibility. This occurs in a social arena where children are expected to behave more like adults by teachers, family members and peers. At the same time as these events occur, many children are going through puberty which can mark the end of physical childhood. For these reasons, school transition acts as a status passage, akin to the adolescent initiation ceremonies of pre-industrial cultures. This chapter reviews the status passage, and how its features emerged from the historic development of the primary and secondary phases of education, and from children's and adults' desire for children to be more independent at school transition.

Ch. 2 Psychological wellbeing

Psychological wellbeing is conceptualised in this chapter as our basic needs for identity, self-esteem, competence, autonomy and social support. At school transition, children are in the developmental period of early adolescence which is characterized by specific emotional, personal and social changes. This chapter reviews how children's psychological wellbeing is affected by these developmental changes. It explains how psychological wellbeing alters at school transition through the process of person-environment fit, which is where people adjust themselves in order to achieve wellbeing within their environment. The chapter ends by illustrating these processes in two case studies of individual children who held divergent attitudes to school.

Ch. 3 Stress and anxiety

Children often suffer from stress and anxiety at school transition. This chapter explains how stress and anxiety occur in the body, and discusses the stressors that children encounter when changing schools. It identifies which children are most at risk for feeling stressed and anxious by discussing gender, puberty and biological sensitivity to stress. Then, it introduces two types of anxiety that come into play when children change schools. The first is transition anxiety which is fear about changing schools, and the second comprises anxiety disorders including generalized anxiety disorder, separation anxiety and social phobia. The chapter summarises how these types of anxiety develop at school transition and contrasts this to the typical development of anxiety in early adolescence.

Ch. 4 Hopes, fears and myths

Before changing schools, children have specific hopes and fears about transition that are similar across countries and eras. Children also recount transition myths, which are tales of violence, humiliation, dangerous teachers and work pressure occurring in their new schools. Many of these hopes, fears and myths relate to children's concerns and desires regarding growing up and the new social order. As such, they offer insight into adolescent worlds where meaning is constructed and acted on by children. These hopes, fears and myths form the largest body of research on how children fare before transition. They can be used by teachers to pre-empt children's concerns and dismantle negative assumptions about transition that have circulated for generations.

Ch. 5 Parents

This chapter describes the many ways in which parents can support children at school transition, using a framework developed from resiliency theory (Rutter, 1985, 1987). There, parents are observed to give targeted support, such as intervening with problems at transition and preparing their children to cope with the move, and everyday support, such as nurturing their child's self-esteem and self-management skills across childhood and providing a stable and loving family environment. The chapter illustrates how specific types of support and lack thereof can influence children's development at transition in the case study of Samantha. It concludes with a discussion on home-school partnerships and their benefit for parents, children and schools.

Ch. 6 Teachers

At school transition, children often switch from a single classroom teacher to being taught by multiple subject specialists. The departure from one familiar face to a world where each subject is taught by a different person is one of the most striking features of the move. Children are often excited about this, expecting their new teachers to have greater subject knowledge, and to treat them more like adults. They also anticipate that they will have difficulty adjusting to multiple teaching styles and fear that their new teachers will be stricter. This chapter compares the typical behaviours of subject specialist teachers to those of their feeder colleagues, and links many of these differences to the development of children's emotional health, motivation and achievement at transition.

Ch. 7 Peers

This chapter reveals what happens to children's relationships with peers as they change schools. It discusses how friends are made and lost, the development of gangs and cliques, gender differences in friendship groups, bullying and victimization, dating, older children and friends outside of school at transition. It brings together the international research on peer support at transition to find that children generally perceive better quality friendships and more friendships, after changing schools. It also discusses how typical changes in peer networks and peer support influence children's psychological wellbeing at transition. The chapter concludes with suggestions for how to improve psychological wellbeing by delivering transition interventions that target peer relationships. 3

Ch. 8 Identity and self-esteem

School transition can spur profound changes in how children think and feel about themselves. This chapter discusses the specific changes that commonly occur in children's personal and collective identities, in the areas of peer relationships, academic confidence, maturity status and career aspirations. It posits that transition acts as a prism, by diffracting children's identities (Noyes, 2006), and as a lens, by bringing elements of their identities into sharp relief. As children reconfigure their identities across transition, they enter a period of identity instability, which teachers can intervene with in order to help children develop in prosocial and psychologically healthy ways.

Ch. 9 Motivation, engagement and achievement

This chapter explores how children's motivation, engagement and achievement alter at school transition. It finds that children are increasingly motivated by performance goals and social comparison after changing schools, in relation to new teaching styles and classmates. Children's engagement also changes in three manners: emotionally, cognitively and behaviourally. Typically, children like school less after transition in the United Kingdom and United States. However, there is a cross-cultural division in how applied they are to their schoolwork, with children reporting more cognitive engagement in the UK and less in the US, after transition. A minority of children in both countries begin to skip school more often,

do less homework and are increasingly disorganized at school. The chapter concludes with a description of the dips and declines that commonly occur in children's achievement after transition, and identifies factors that influence this achievement loss.

Ch. 10 Vulnerable children

This chapter focuses on special groups of children, whose characteristics put them at risk for a more difficult transition. Specifically they are those with special educational needs, ethnic minority children and children who experience puberty earlier than their peers. These children display typical patterns of emotional, personal, and social adjustment according to the qualities that set them apart from the mainstream. When adults are aware of these risk factors and put social and personal supports in place, this alleviates vulnerable children's chances of maladaptation. However, only special educational needs children are typically identified and catered to at transition, leaving other groups of vulnerable children unsupported.

Ch. 11 Interventions for wellbeing

This chapter discusses school transition interventions, which are activities that are specially designed to support children, teaching and learning, and data transfer, across the transition period. These are reviewed using the framework of the Five Bridges (Galton, Gray & Rudduck, 1999) of administrative, pedagogical, curricular, self-management and social interventions. The chapter shows how the number of interventions in each area has differed across time, with a trend towards more self-management interventions and bridging units in recent eras. It provides evidence on whether transition interventions actually support children's wellbeing, through a systematic review of intervention evaluations. It ends with suggestions for designing interventions that support children's psychological wellbeing which is conceptualised as their identity, self-esteem, competence, autonomy and social support, with respect to each of the Five Bridges.

Ch. 12 Research and evaluation

This chapter gives practical advice on how teachers can evaluate school transition in individual schools. It argues that transition should be evaluated using systematic research, in order to produce trustworthy accounts of its management and impact. These accounts can be used to evaluate transition management and student cohorts across time, and to develop more successful interventions. After explaining what evaluation is and how to overcome typical evaluation hurdles, the chapter gives step by step instructions for how to evaluate school transition through systematic research. It covers how to design research and use questionnaires, interviews, audio/visual methods and document analysis. It then discusses how teachers and children can be involved in research as active participants and co-researchers, and concludes with a guide to report writing.

Ch. 13 School transition leadership

Many schools have a transition coordinator or manager, who is often a senior teacher. This chapter interviewed four transition coordinators and a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) to uncover the factors central to successful transition leadership. These included having a dedicated transition coordinator role, being supported by senior management staff, having a transition team, working collaboratively, talking about transition with a range of stakeholders, and having adequate professional and personal resources. The transition coordinators demonstrated that their effectiveness was tied to integrating transition coordination into their professional identity. Finally, they spoke of the importance of raising the status of transition and creating a culture of transition within and across schools. The chapter ends with suggestions on how to do this through education programmes for school leaders and teacher trainees.