

# International Perspectives on Transition to School

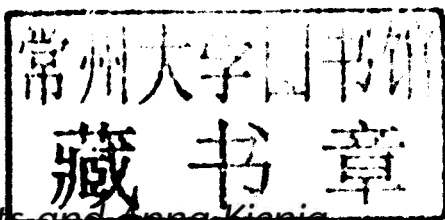
Reconceptualising beliefs, policy and practice



Edited by KAY MARGETTS and ANNA KIENIG

# INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSITION TO SCHOOL

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policy and practice



*Edited by Kay Margetts and Anna Kienig*

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# INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSITION TO SCHOOL

With increasing attention given by governments and policy makers to children's transition to school, and the associated need for educators, families and communities to be supported in the process, changes are often required to existing structures and pedagogy.

This book is framed around the notion of transition as a time of change for those involved in the transition process and as a time for reconceptualising beliefs, policy and practice.

It explores transition from a number of international perspectives and raises issues around the coherence of:

- how children perceive and respond to starting school;
- the roles and expectations of parents;
- developmental changes for parents;
- supporting children with diverse learning needs;
- how policy, curriculum and pedagogy are conceived and implemented.

Readers will be informed about current practices and issues arising out of research in Europe, Scandinavia, the United Kingdom and Australia and will be stimulated to consider how they can change their own transition beliefs, policies and practices.

*International Perspectives on Transition to School* is essential reading for researchers and educators and anyone wanting to know more about the transition to school and how to support young children, their families and schools.

**Kay Margetts** is Associate Professor in Early Childhood Studies, and Director of International Baccalaureate Programs in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne, Australia.

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editors, Kay Margetts and Anna Kienig, acknowledge the authors in this book who have contributed significantly to the development of debate, research and discussion around transition to primary school. Each one has contributed to the reconceptualising of transition to school and associated changes that have occurred in educational policy and practice that will hopefully continue to evolve.

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## **PART I**

# Introduction



# 1

## A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR TRANSITION

*Kay Margetts and Anna Kienig*

### **Introduction**

Associated with an increasing focus across the world on the development and provision of universal high quality early childhood education and care for children from birth, many governments are also establishing policies to support children's transition into formal schooling. These trends recognise the importance of early experiences for children's ongoing learning, development and success at both the personal level and the national level, and are frequently associated with the reconceptualisation of beliefs, policy, traditions and practice. In some countries this has included significant changes to the school system itself, including changes to the starting school age. It is important that all those involved and impacted by ensuing changes – policy makers, as well as staff in schools and early childhood services, children and families, allied professionals and communities – are supported and given voice in the processes.

Transitions and the associated processes of change or movement from one situation or activity to another have long been conceived as part of the passage of life, and the associated adaptations as a lifelong, continuous process (Elder 1998), as a 'rite of passage' (van Gennep 1960), as a 'border-crossing' (Campbell Clark 2000) and as 'rites of institution' (Bourdieu 1997 cited in Webb, Schirato & Danaher 2002). In educational settings, Johansson (2007) proposes that these changes can be *vertical* in nature, for example, from home to early childhood service, preschool to primary school, primary school to secondary school, and so on, as well as transitions between classes and teachers within a particular setting. Vertical transitions are usually linked to children's increasing ages, stages of schooling or changes in geographic location. In contrast, transitions can also be *horizontal*, characterised by frequent changes in relatively short time frames



typically associated with daily life, such as the move between the social networks of school, outside-school-hours-care, extra-curricula activities and home. Successful transition should build on children's resilience, resourcefulness and relationships with others and 'should result in a child who feels strong and competent, and able to handle new experiences with confidence' (Brooker 2002: 12). In this book, the key focus is on the vertical transition from preschool into the first year of formal schooling.

Contemporary research and policy around transition to school have been influenced by different theories, issues of cultural understanding, equity and social justice, recognition of the rights of the child and children's agency and increased emphasis on the importance of parents and families. Understanding the role of, and developing, links with others is an important part of transition and an opportunity for building *communitas* through shared experiences (Turner 1969). In building *communitas* it is important to recognise the collective and individual vulnerabilities associated with participation and marginalisation (Garpelin 2003, 2004).

The (bio)ecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1986; Bronfenbrenner & Morris 2006) has contributed strongly to the recognition that transitions are complex. This model acknowledges that humans do not develop in isolation, but in relation to the contexts and environments of family and home, school, community and wider society. The complex, ever-changing 'layers' of these environments or ecosystems, and the interactions within and among them, influence an individual's development. 'Each person lives within a micro-system, inside a meso-system, embedded in an exo-system, all of which are part of the macro-system – like a set of concentric circles, nested one inside the other' (Woolfolk & Margetts 2013: 25). In addition, the chronosystem helps explain the influence of normative and non-normative life cycle events overtime such as transitions, personal trauma and socio-historical events.

Transition and change occur 'whenever a person's position in the ecological environment is altered as the result of a change in role, setting, or both' (Bronfenbrenner 1979: 26). As children move between two environments such as the family setting (primary developmental context) and the school setting (secondary developmental context), the process of transition requires meeting the demands of these two microsystem-level environments. The differences between the requirements of these settings may invite displays of the problems related to adjustment in early childhood. The course of a child's early transitions can become a pattern for further ecological transitions and the ability of the child to function in different environments (Bronfenbrenner 1986).

Changes in one ecosystem can lead to changes to the role of an individual and their identity, with possible long-term consequences. A number of chapters in this book focus on changes at the policy level – the macro- and exo-system levels – that involve dominant beliefs, legislation, local authorities and providers, and the impetus for these changes and impact at the micro- and meso-system levels.