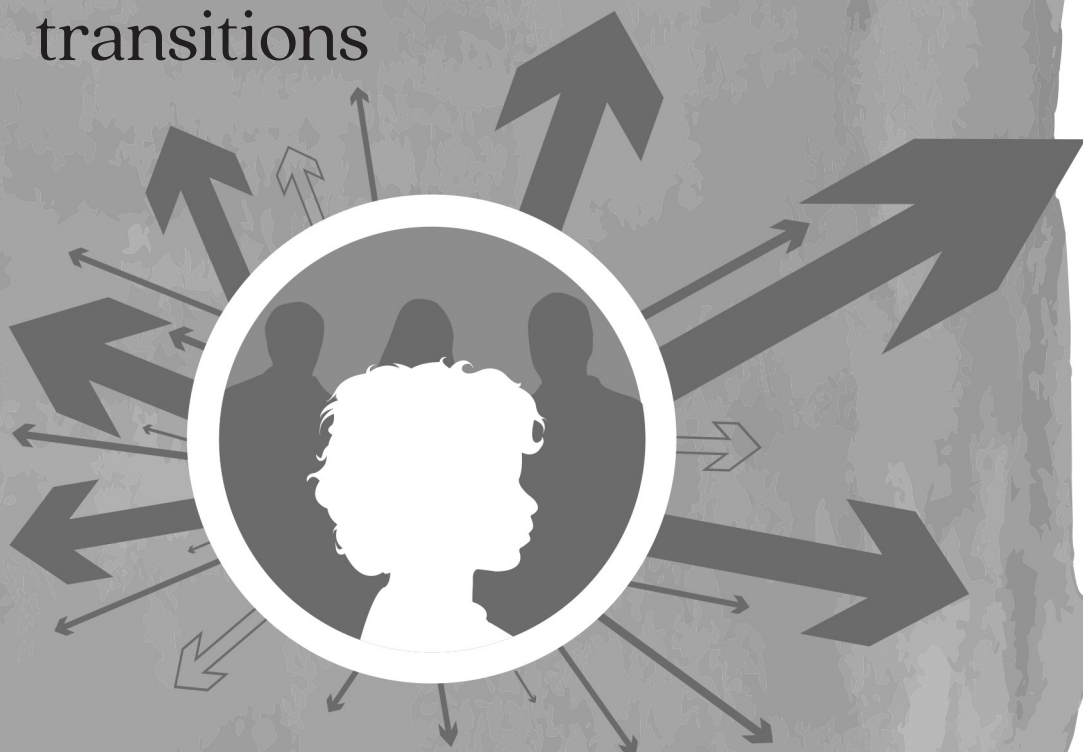


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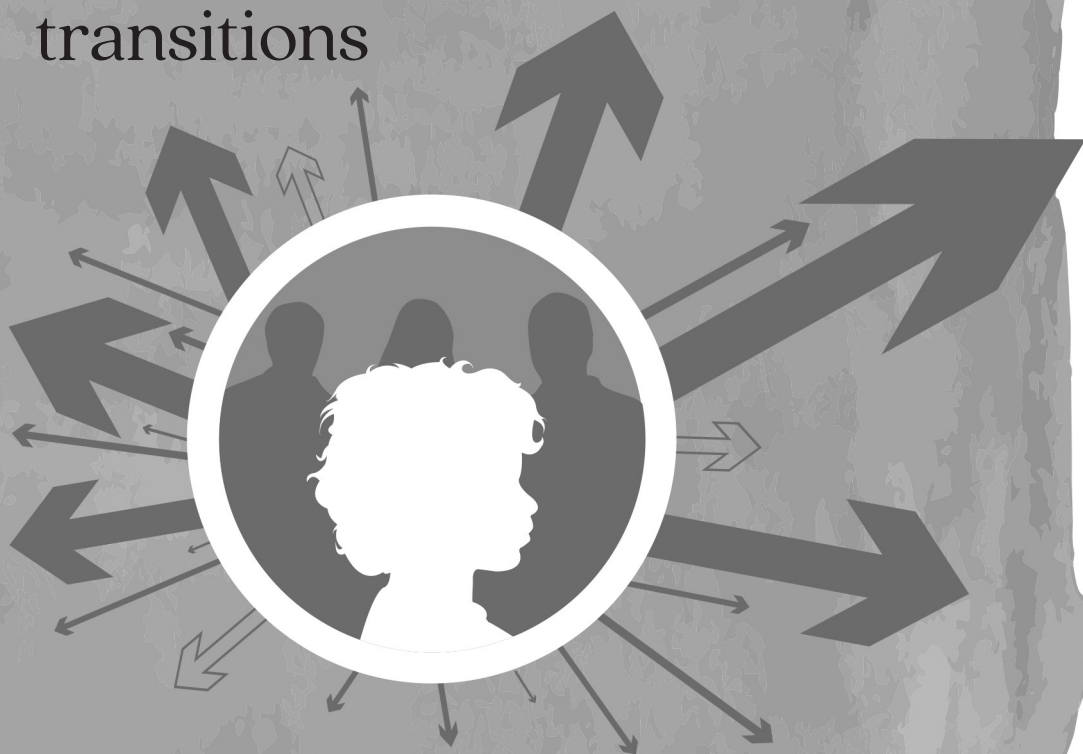


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**Rhiannon Packer with Catherine Jones,
Amanda Thomas and Philippa Watkins**

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I. INTRODUCTION

Rationale

This book is inspired by the ongoing discourse and policy debates surrounding transitions in education. There is a clear recognition that learner experiences of transition, particularly the early ones, can have a long-term impact on educational achievement as well as general life experiences and well-being (Field, 2010). A life-course theory approach (in conjunction with other theories) has been used to examine successful transitions. Life-course theory provides a useful theoretical framework as it recognises that all stages of an individual's life are intertwined with each other, with the lives of those around them (overlapping with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory) and with the experiences of those who have gone before (World Health Organisation, 2018). This book, therefore, adopts the stage-like approach of life-course theory (supported by other behaviourist theory) to help gain a more complete picture of transitions. In doing so, it considers the prior experiences, ongoing ones and reflections of all those involved: the learner, the parent and the practitioner.

Issues around definitions

The importance of providing effective transitions in education continues to be a key feature of policy, practice and research (Ingram et al, 2009; Colley, 2007). It has been recognised for some time that transitions can be problematic and require support, particularly for those children and young people who might be vulnerable, struggling with social and emotional issues or *at risk* (Ecclestone, 2007). There is also significant research which associates transitions between different stages of education with a dip in achievement (Galton and McLellan, 2018). It is important, therefore, to be clear on what exactly is meant by the term *transitions*, and to which phases in education it can be applied. This is especially important as there still remains an inconsistency in the way the term *transition* is used and understood.

Traditional approaches to transitions in education considered it as a *one-point* event, focusing on, for example, the first day at a new school or in a new class. However, they are now understood to involve more than this, and while they do involve some sense of *movement* or *transfer*, they are not just that. As the learner progresses through the education system there are other significant changes. These can include issues of identity as well as developmental and emotional changes that last as long as the individual needs to make such a change (Welsh Government, 2017). Considering transitions in this context acknowledges that the term *transition* is as much about the psychological routes needed in adapting to the change event or disruption (Kralik et al, 2006) as it is to do with the change itself.

At its most straight forward, transition can be seen as a natural process (Davis et al, 2015), a movement from one institutional setting or activity to another (Lombardi, 1992). Galton and McLellan (2018), in their study of research on transitions, conceived it metaphorically as a bridge, aiding the movement of a student over time from A to B. This approach is evident in early-childhood-development theory, especially in terms of Piaget's arguments for '*ages and stages*' (Carey et al, 2015) a concept criticised as being too linear and reflecting '*Western or Eurocentric epistemology*' (Downes et al, 2018, p 443). As settings become more inclusive, so transitions need to take into account more vulnerable children for whom transition may pose a greater risk than for others (Symonds, 2015; Davis et al, 2015). For example, Davis et al (2015) point out that a key issue faced by learners with special educational needs is that they are expected to adhere to pre-established systems and processes. However, it is arguable that it is not only vulnerable pupils that experience this risk. If transition is regarded only as a surface phenomenon, a matter of transference from one place to another, then more fundamental and complex meanings and issues may be missed. Downes et al (2018) raise the issues of disguised meanings, citing Bourdieu's (1986) concept of symbolic violence, as a part of the transition process that might be ignored. This refers to the idea of subconscious subordination, where the place travelled to is the place of power and so for all those pupils experiencing transitions there is an expectation that they must conform to the place to which they will move.

Issues surrounding transition

While transitions are considered by many as a normal part of the journey through formal schooling (Topping, 2011), there is evidence to suggest that early transitions often set the stage for future positive or negative ones (Rosenkoetter et al, 1994). For some children the transition from one class or setting to another compromises academic progress (Ashton, 2008) and sometimes well-being (Marks, 2004). This is of significance to policy makers because the experience and learning of children and young people in education impacts on society and economy (Eccleston, 2007); both of which now present significant challenges. The European Commission (2018) makes it clear that managing transitions in educational settings should be seen as an opportunity to provide learners with key life skills, as well as promoting equity and excellence. This is because change has become an increasing pattern within the workforce, caused by things like demographic change, changing employment patterns and technological advancement (Eccleston, 2007).

In the United Kingdom, key transitions are given significant emphasis. These include pivotal ones between stages in learning, for example the transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, which has long been an area of focus of policy in both England and Wales (Hodgkin et al, 2013). However, there are other more subtle transitions to do with subject choices, different teachers and different classes that also need to be considered. Research suggests that transitions are often associated with underachievement, a 'dip' in pupil attainment (Sutherland et al, 2010) and negative impacts on well-being.

To be effective, therefore, transitions, need to be seen as more than a shift in place, limited to a specific time and part of an academic process. Instead, it needs to be acknowledged that transitions

are in fact '*fundamental features of social life and one of the defining characteristics of everyday life of "becoming"*' (Field, 2010, p xvii). This means that the concept of transition should embrace a much broader notion of education than simply the learning experienced within formal institutions at a given time. It includes a tacit learning about identity and self, what a person can become and where that person is located socially and spatially.

Ways to approach transitions

The approach taken in this book, therefore, is to consider transitions in terms of cultural '*rites of passage*'. According to Martin-McDonald and Biernoff (2002, p 347) these '*rites of passage*' can be quite varied and often occur when there is a change in '*cultural expectations, social roles, and status*' in terms of changes to position, in relationships or situational changes. What they share, however, is a sense of movement through key aspects of life. Van Gennep's (2019) theory of rites of passage identifies three distinct phases to these transitions.

1. The first is identified as rites of separation where the individual is removed from what is already known.
2. The second is rites of transition as the learner is in the transition, in a kind of *no-man's land*.
3. The third is the rites of incorporation, where the individual is absorbed into the new environment.

This idea of three phases is also found in Bridges and Bridges (2019), who identify the three parts in terms of a beginning, a *fallow* time and an ending. What these models propose is the idea of transition having a linear trajectory composed of starting and finishing points. However, the simplicity of this often overlooks that transition is often ongoing, quite complex and does not, always follow a chronological trajectory.

As well as the concept of *rites of passage*, there is also the approach taken by Lam and Pollard (2006) to consider. They argued that there are two types of transition taking place that need to be differentiated:

1. the horizontal transitions (from change of one context for another); and
2. the vertical transitions (when the child becomes established in the new setting).

The first type is the shift between place and the second is the adaptation to the new place. These, therefore, involves shifts in identity and agency (Ecclestone, 2007) and can be a time of '*intense accelerated development demands that are socially regulated*' (Lam and Pollard, 2006, p 125). Therefore, it is important that all involved are given a voice. Ranson's (2000) '*pedagogy of voice*', which requires active listening and learning from the opinions and feelings of others, goes some way to help understand perspectives (Wertsch, 1991), and finding ways to improve participation and teaching and learning (Wei, 2017).

Structure of this book

The transitions discussed in this book are about both the change from one setting to another and the shift from one identity to another. Its focus is predominantly on those in compulsory education; however, an international perspective is also considered. The voices heard are not just those of the learners, but also those who provide or facilitate a support system around them – the parent and the practitioner – and they speak of the process of change as experienced by all of them.

CHAPTER 2: THEORIES OF TRANSITION

Chapter 2 provides a number of key theoretical frameworks through which transitions are explored in this book. It presents the key theories and explains how they are used to explore transitions from the learner's, the parents' and the practitioner's perspective. The chapter enables the development of an analytical lens through which experiences of transitions discussed later in the book can be analysed. It highlights the fundamental importance of reflection, the use of theory to support practice and the necessity of preparing all stakeholders early for transitions.

CHAPTER 3: VULNERABLE TRANSITIONS

Chapter 3 considers transitions from the perspective of learners identified under the Equality Act (UK Government, 2010) as being vulnerable. This includes learners who are refugees, asylum seekers, traveller children, children with identity and gender questions and children with disabilities. It looks at the evidence that shows these children, some of whom are not considered to have special educational needs (SEN), additional learning needs (ALN) in Wales or additional support needs (ASN) in Scotland (DfE, 2018; NASEN, 2014), still require additional support particularly when making the change from one educational setting to another.

CHAPTER 4: LESSONS IN LISTENING 1: THE LEARNER'S VOICE

Chapter 4 explores how learners interpret, navigate and make sense of their experiences during various transition points and across various transition boundaries. Learner responses to different transitions are analysed and explored from both a theoretical and practical perspective. Of particular interest is the changes in the agency and identities of children as they settle into different educational settings. The chapter argues that there is a need to listen to learners about their transition experiences and to use this to inform future practice.

CHAPTER 5: LESSONS IN LISTENING 2: GIVING VOICE TO THE LEARNER'S SUPPORT SYSTEM

Chapter 5 recognises the value of the parents' or caregivers' voice during transitions experienced by their children. It considers how past experiences of transition by the parents themselves can influence how their children approach the transition. It argues that the role of the parent or caregiver

needs to be given importance as they are often the most significant influence on the learner's successful transition and are key in preparing the learner for forthcoming change. It argues that while schools do involve parents, it is often a one-way relationship with schools leading the agenda, more so as the learner progresses through the education system.

CHAPTER 6: PRACTITIONER DISCOURSE: PREPARING AND SUPPORTING TRANSITIONS

Chapter 6 explores practitioner perceptions of transition. It examines the role that they play in instigating and facilitating that process and analyses how procedures around transition are timed and controlled. It explores the fundamental purposes of the transition process and recognises the importance of the practitioner's role in its effectiveness. It argues that practitioners must be fully aware of the significance of transition activities upon individuals and should consistently reflect on clarity of expectations of not just the pupils, but the parents/caregivers and themselves as well.

CHAPTER 7: INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSITIONS

Chapter 7 considers transitions from an international perspective with a particular focus on European countries. It explores some of the commonalities and differences of transitions experienced elsewhere and identifies some themes to explore. By looking at what is done elsewhere, observations can inform further discussions in the United Kingdom. It explores the theoretical context for these observations, as well as providing more specific experiences of those who have lived through it.

At the end of each chapter, readers will find reflective questions that encourage further deep thinking about what has been discussed, as well as suggested reading if further information is required.

Keys

The settings from which data was collected are identified as below.

- Further-education (FE) college 1
- FE college 2
- FE college 3
- Secondary school 1
- Secondary school 2
- Sixth form
- Year 1
- Year 2
- Reception 1
- Reception 2
- Key Stage 2 (KS2)
- Special school 1

The key used to identify the voices are as follows.

- Parent: Pt
- Learner: L
- Practitioner: P
- Head of Year: HoY
- Head of Key Stage 4: HKS4
- Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator: SENCo
- Secondary teacher
- SEN teacher 1
- Transition officer

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