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Published in:
Review of Education

DOI:
[10.1002/rev3.3198](https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3198)

Publication date:
2020

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication in Discovery Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Jindal-Snape, D., Hannah, E. F. S., Cantali, D., Barlow, W., & MacGillivray, S. (2020). Context and Implications Document for: Systematic Literature Review of PrimarySecondary Transitions: International Research. *Review of Education*, 8(2), 567-569. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3198>

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Context and Implications Document for: Systematic literature review of primary-secondary transitions: International research

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This guide accompanies the following article:

Jindal-Snape, D., Hannah, E.F.S., Cantali, D., Barlow, W., Macgillivray, S. (In press), Systematic literature review of primary-secondary transitions: International research. *Review of Education*, [DOI will be added by Wiley]

Author's Introduction

Every year millions of young people start secondary school or equivalent around the world. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how policy and practice can support them so that not only are they able to deal with transitions to secondary school well, they can also flourish. However, due to the relative paucity of existing literature reviews on primary-secondary transition over the ten-year period (2008-2018), and the diversity of foci, inclusion/exclusion criteria, we found that it is impossible to draw conclusions that can inform policy and practice and future directions in research. Therefore, we carried out a systematic literature review based on the EPPI-Centre approach to understand children's experiences of primary-secondary transitions, the impact of transitions on educational and wellbeing outcomes, and factors that contribute to their experiences and outcomes. Several relevant databases were searched, namely Web of Science (WoS) (Science Citation Index Expanded, Social Sciences Citation Index, Arts & Humanities Citation Index); the Education Resources Education Centre (ERIC); British Education Index (BEI); PsycINFO; and Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA), along with relevant journals. From a total of 4,652 records, based on our research questions and inclusion criteria, 96 papers were selected for synthesis. We used the theoretical lens of Multiple and Multi-dimensional Transitions theory when analysing and synthesising the findings of these papers.

This international review is the first attempt to bring together transition experiences, educational and wellbeing outcomes, and protective and risk factors. It is also the first paper to bring together findings from different educational systems and models of schools. Therefore, it provides unique insights into primary-secondary transitions. The findings suggest that positive or negative experiences of children were primarily expressed in the context of relationships with their teachers and peers. Children and parents were found to be more concerned about relationships than academic matters. We found that there is a decline in educational and wellbeing outcomes; however, a cause and effect relationship is missing. Further, a clear relationship could not be established between children's educational and wellbeing outcomes. Similarly, there was a lack of indication of the proportion of children experiencing a decline in educational or wellbeing outcomes. There is evidence to suggest that good relationships between the child, their peers and teachers led to better transition experiences, and educational and wellbeing outcomes. Parental involvement improved educational outcomes and also facilitated successful transitions. The literature review suggested that there are several eco-systemic factors that can facilitate or act as barriers to smooth transitions; highlighting the complexity and dynamic nature of transitions. Although investigated in a small number of studies, school belongingness and school connectedness were found to be important for the success of the primary-secondary transition. The findings suggest that children with additional support needs have specific needs during transitions.

Implications for Policy

1. At a national level, policy makers should ensure that the transition processes are tailored to meet the diverse needs of children with additional support needs, being mindful that transition can in itself trigger additional support needs for some children.
2. It is important that the negative discourse about primary-secondary transitions changes internationally by also highlighting the positive experiences and outcomes.

3. It is important to consider the impact of educational systems and environment on transition experiences and outcomes with a view to modifying them to facilitate successful transitions.

Implications for Practice

1. Transition practices should support the development of a sense of belongingness and school connectedness as they were found to have an impact on attainment of educational and wellbeing outcomes.
2. Children need to be supported to develop strong peer networks through planned activities and be provided with opportunities to form secure attachments with school-based professionals.
3. An ongoing dialogue between, and within, the schools is required to ensure pedagogical and curricular continuity.
4. It is important that there is a strong child-parent-teacher partnership during transition planning and preparation.