TRANSITION PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DIVERSE NEEDS

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Series Editor: Chris Forlin

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TRANSITION PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DIVERSE NEEDS

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

The adoption internationally of inclusive practice as the most equitable and all-encompassing approach to education and its relation to compliance with various international Declarations and Conventions underpins the importance of this series for people working at all levels of education and schooling in both developed and less developed countries. There is little doubt that inclusive education is complex and diverse and that there are enormous disparities in understanding and application at both inter- and intracountry levels. A broad perspective on inclusive education throughout this series is taken, encompassing a wide range of contemporary viewpoints, ideas, and research for enabling the development of more inclusive schools, education systems, and communities.

Volumes in this series on *International Perspectives on Inclusive Education* contribute to the academic and professional discourse by providing a collection of philosophies and practices that can be reviewed by considering local, contextual, and cultural situations to assist governments, educators, peripatetic staffs, and other professionals to provide the best education for all children. Each volume in the series focuses on a key aspect of inclusive education and provides critical chapters by contributing leaders in the field who discuss theoretical positions, quality research, and impacts on school and classroom practice. Different volumes address issues relating to the diversity of student need within heterogeneous classrooms and the preparation of teachers and other staff to work in inclusive schools. Systemic changes and practice in schools encompass a wide perspective of learners to provide ideas on reframing education to ensure that it is inclusive of all. Evidence-based research practices underpin a plethora of suggestions for decision-makers and practitioners, incorporating current ways of thinking about and implementing inclusive education.

While many barriers have been identified that may potentially constrain the implementation of effective inclusive practices, this series aims to identify such key concerns and offer practical and best practice approaches to overcoming them. Adopting a thematic approach for each volume, readers will be able to quickly locate a collection of research and practice related to a topic of interest. By transforming schools into inclusive communities of practice all children can have the opportunity to access and participate in quality and equitable education to enable them to obtain the skills to become contributory global citizens. This series, therefore, is highly recommended to support education decision-makers, practitioners, researchers, and academics, who have a professional interest in the inclusion of children and youth who are marginalizing in inclusive schools and classrooms.

This volume on *Transition Programs for Children and Youth with Diverse Needs* was unintentionally impacted in many ways by the international COVID-19 pandemic that occurred throughout 2020 and continued into 2021. Authors of this volume grafted ideas in supporting learners with disabilities, marginalized, vulnerable, or underrepresented populations, with transitions during extended amounts of lockdown time, and while grappling with new models of online teaching. In the midst of these new challenges, they dedicated themselves to writing chapters for this book as they were keen to have their information available to help support others. The result is testament to their dedication to become involved in this important volume and I applaud them on their efforts.

During these days of extreme public health issues, transitions are affecting all who are involved in educational systems, with education as a whole needing to be engaged in a newly emerging transition process. Like a liminal space which continues with an uncertain ending, unknowing what will happen to traditional models of schooling as systems emerge from the pandemic provides little guidance for teachers when planning to reengage their students. In many instances transitions are likely to be even more demanding than previously, especially for those with diverse learning needs. The future of schooling as we know it will need to adapt to unstable certainties as countries plan how to contend with this pandemic and are cognizant of potential future instabilities. Planners will need to be better equipped to identify and support the educational and emotional needs of children and youth during such uncertainties, who may be even more marginalized than previously. Prolonged absences from attending an actual school environment have the capacity to destabilize those who have previously found inclusion in education challenging. Transitioning back into a school environment after extended periods of working from home may raise anxiety levels and pose the need for additional support to ensure the needs of all children and youth are met. In addition to normal school transitions, transition back into schooling for the most vulnerable children and youth may require the implementation of models that offer interim placements in more supportive environments, so that they can become reacquainted with the expectations of schooling before being reintegrated into a large regular class.

This volume contains a plethora of excellent ideas and practical approaches for supporting a range of transitions that children and youth with diverse needs encounter across their life span. Many of these approaches will be of particular benefit to those involved in providing support during these unprecedented times. Although the book has grouped these into different levels of schooling for easy access by readers, the strategies employed at one level with minimal adaptation may well be utilized at other stages of a child's life. I encourage readers to access sections that are most useful to them depending upon their level of teaching, but also invite them strongly to review other sections that may provide further extremely helpful ideas.

Although this volume focuses mainly on transition support for learners, it must be acknowledged that parents are also in a liminal space, and they too may need support in decision-making for their children. As children and youth go through a range of emotions when being expected to return to school, parents

also may find this transition psychologically demanding as they let go of their children and hand them back to new teachers who will not have the understandings of exactly how extended absences have or may have impacted on their children's lives. This volume includes two chapters with parent reflections on transitions and in addition, several chapters highlight the role of partnerships by giving considerable thought to how parents and schools can better collaborate for a more stable and less difficult transition.

Volume 18 builds considerably and highly effectively on previous books in this series by tackling the far-reaching aspects of establishing and supporting effective transitions throughout a child's life. This could not be timelier with the uncertainties that currently surround education for learners with diverse needs. Like the model of inclusion, schools need to transform themselves to ensure that they meet the needs of their students who constantly have to cope with an enormous range of different transitions. From the research identified in this volume it is evident that this will not happen unless schools reform and become considerably more proactive in their approaches to better enabling transitions. Where authors have reported that this has occurred, through implementation of a range of different models, the outcome for children and youth with diverse needs has been positive and stabilizing, giving them confidence in their ability to achieve and emotional support to know that they are welcomed and valued members of society. This book is essential reading for all involved in working with learners with challenging needs throughout their schooling and into postschool options. I recommend this to you as an exceptional addition to the *International Perspectives on Inclusive Education* series.

Chris Forlin
Series Editor

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PREFACE

INTRODUCTION

Life consists of change. Change of seasons. Change of locations. Change of roles and responsibilities. Change can be minimal or significant; predictable and expected, or unpredictable and surprising. Life changes often involve a shift from one status, position, or identity to another. Changes associated with developmental or chronological markers, such as entering and leaving formal schooling, and entry into or exit from the workplace, have often been referred to as transitions (Strnadová & Cumming, 2016). According to Baker and Irwin (2019), "… the word 'transition' is commonly used to signify movements made—which are often ritualized—as people 'transfer' into and out of different stages and domains in their life courses" (p. 4). Typically, transitions are envisioned as linear sequences that incorporate a socially and culturally constructed conceptualization of both the process, that is how one should navigate the transition, and the acceptable or prescribed outcomes, or what is expected to be achieved. When a person develops and demonstrates the skills or assumes the roles and responsibilities that are expected by society, the transition is considered to be successful.

THE TRANSITION PROCESS

The process of transition is often depicted as consisting of three phases that incorporate the concepts of before, during, and after; that is, leaving something behind and passing through an in-between phase with the objective of emerging with a new or revised orientation or position. During a child's school life, they must go through many transitions, ranging from major changes to minor ones. The most challenging times usually occur when transitioning between different types of schooling. Such transitions commence in the early years when starting kindergarten and then moving into formal schooling. Following five to seven years in a primary school children transition into either a middle school or directly into a high school. At the end of compulsory schooling many students will also need to move to a senior college before transitioning into either further study at a university or undertaking tertiary and further education. Transition from education into the workforce can occur at two different stages, at the end of compulsory schooling or following any further study.

While major life transitions can and often do incorporate challenges, Strnadová and Cumming (2016) suggest that "… these challenges may be greatly

exacerbated for those with disabilities" (p. 2). In addition, children and youth representing marginalized, vulnerable, or underrepresented groups, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and refugee and immigrant populations, may experience transitions that are less linear and more complex as they navigate unfamiliar or disparate educational structures and systems (Baker & Irwin, 2019; Osgood et al., 2010).

Transition Considerations for Students with Disabilities and Diverse or Marginalized Groups

During transitions, a range of aspects need to be considered and addressed by all stakeholders. These tend to fall into three major categories of physical, educational, and social-emotional needs.

Physical aspects can involve consideration of access to facilities, the provision of assistive technologies and physical aids, classroom facilities and layout structures, transportation to and from school, system level supports, and for some children and youth at certain times during their schooling the provision of appropriate onsite accommodation.

Educational considerations relate more directly to forms of instructional collaboration, curriculum and pedagogical modifications, the use of education assistants, and the involvement of peripatetic staff. There may also be a need for alternative assessments that must be planned to provide an appropriate way for students to demonstrate learning. The development and ongoing review of a child's individual education plan will also have to be scheduled with parental involvement organized to maximize the educational opportunities provided. Adopting a universal design for learning where whole school change occurs to meet the needs of all children and youth is seen as being the optimal approach to enabling educational inclusion (Semon et al., 2021).

Emotional support is a key aspect of any transition planning as individuals with additional needs are more likely to experience anxiety, worry, concerns, and fear, when their regulated, stable, and structured environment alters. Promoting social inclusion is of the utmost importance as placing children and youth into new environments without effective emotional support can lead to ineffective and unsustainable inclusion (Scorgie & Forlin, 2019). Having a positive sense of belonging through acceptance, strong interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers, and school values of evidence-based culturally responsive practices (Hagiwara et al., 2019) will all assist in helping students through the process of transition.

TRANSITION AND LIMINAL SPACES

Originating from the work of van Gennep in the early 1900s and Turner in the 1960s that examined ritual rites of passage, the term *liminality* has emerged to represent the in-between period occurring during a transition (Baker & Irwin, 2019; Brown et al., 2017). Baker and Irwin (2019) describe liminality as "… the

ambiguous, unstable middle ground of a ritual where the individual has moved from one state but is yet to navigate the changes to move into the next state" (p. 5). The liminal phase is often viewed as a period of identity construction. According to Conroy and O'Leary-Kelly (2014), it incorporates a "… dynamic process of self-construal, a time in which the sense of 'who I was' gives way to a sense of 'who I am becoming'" (pp. 67–68), and finally culminates in "who I have become." This involves the crafting or revisioning of an individual's personal narrative with a focus on both self-perception, that is how one views or desires to view oneself, and the responses that are received or hoped to be received from others (Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014; Vincent, 2019).

Effective transitions, therefore, require components that incorporate both internal and external confirmation or acceptance. For example, Brown et al. (2017), who examined the experiences of 16 people who attested recovery from Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME) or chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), suggested that when personal accounts of recovery were not validated or affirmed by others, a new experience of liminality was introduced which placed the individuals "… 'betwixt and between' health and illness" (p. 706). Similarly, Reid-Cunningham (2009) cited the work of Murray and colleagues to suggest that persons with disability "… may experience an extended or even perpetual state of liminality because of role confusion and a lack of acceptance by others" (p. 106).

While liminal spaces involve anticipation and hope, they can also incorporate a sense of apprehension and loss, which is particularly noticeable for those with diverse needs. Vincent (2019), for example, explored transition from higher education into postuniversity options for young adults with autism and found that several mentioned loss associated with the predictable and familiar educational environment and the friendships formed, and anxiety regarding the unknowns and potential loss of control associated with the transition. Individuals who had some introduction to and experience with the posttransition environment prior to the period of transition demonstrated more positive and optimistic perspectives during transition. Vincent suggested the need for transition planning to begin prior to the final year of university.

Liminal spaces provide opportunities for learning and change to occur within a person, organization, or community, as individuals and stakeholders reflect on how integrating new perspectives, information, and actions might enhance the ability to achieve a desired outcome or result in personal or organizational transformation (Land et al., 2014). Navigating transitions for persons with disability or unique life experiences often requires the input of others who can envision possibilities and facilitate the acquisition of skills and attributes to promote optimal outcomes. What this might involve is the willingness of others to enter a liminal space, such as teachers who demonstrate willingness to acquire and utilize inclusive pedagogy; employers who recognize and value the unique strengths, abilities, and perspectives an individual brings to a work environment; policy makers who affirm the right of individuals to access accommodations, and environments that promote inclusion and equity. It may also involve community leaders who collaborate with members to provide resources to assure quality of life for all, and parents who act as facilitators, supporters, mediators, and often

catalysts throughout the process. Therefore, successful transition through liminal spaces may require collaboration from multiple stakeholders willing to consider new perspectives, processes, and potential opportunities.

FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND LIMINAL SPACES

Liminality impacts on more than just the person in transition, with many uncertainties and emotional challenges also experienced by the parent, the child's siblings, the extended family, and other stakeholders such as teachers. Most importantly throughout these periods is the role that parents play regarding supporting their child's transition through their schooling and into postschool options (Leonard et al., 2016). For many parents, their greatest concerns occur during the liminal space periods that happen between the major transitions in their child's life. The parent frequently finds themselves embedded in their child's liminal space and acting as a facilitator between their child and the school to enable an effective transition. This role appears to be ongoing, especially when the child has a disability. This is clearly illustrated in this small clip from a parent of Rose who is now in Year 11 in high school.

Rose is 16. She's in Year 11. She had quite a bit of bullying in primary school. So she was quite traumatized when she was in school. She just wasn't really happy. I think the most challenging transition was going from primary school to high school. I just think that was the most difficult thing. It was a very difficult transition for her. So now she's got anxiety from the early years of problems. I think what if she had told me? I could approach the principal and I could've said something. I can't do anything because she didn't let me know. In high school she was basically getting straight E's in the class. So I took her to a tutor to try and help her. I've taken her to a psychologist to help with her confidence. She was not diagnosed until she was 14 with Asperger's Syndrome. She now gets some support.

   As a parent I think you need to stay on top of what your child is doing and stay on top of what the school is doing. And if there's any different changes in her, speak to her, then if you aren't happy about something, you need to go back to school. So I'm sort of the go-between with Rose and the school. I don't think parents should just leave things up to the school's wishes especially if the child's got a disability or they're getting behind. I think parents need to step up and be involved more. I'm very much involved in what Rose does a lot and I know exactly where she is in the school.

   I don't really know what sort of career she will do when she leaves school; and that's what kind of worries me, 'cos I know she wants to take a year off. I don't know what she's going to do. I've no idea. I will just gauge how she goes, what she does in the first year. Otherwise, I may look at putting her into a TAFE course. I will just gauge it for the first couple of months and see what she's doing.

   Lourdes, mother (extracted from a Zoom interview)

EFFECTIVE TRANSITIONING

The purpose of this volume in the series, *International Perspectives on Inclusive Education*, is to invite readers to navigate the liminal space of transition through exploring innovative perspectives and practices regarding transition programs that incorporate effective interventions and strategies for potentially marginalized individuals from multiple frameworks. In addition to knowledge and skill training, programs, and strategies explored throughout the volume address attitudes, expectations, and perceptions about what it means to be accorded acceptance and to achieve a sense of belonging through cocrafting of identity, with sensitivity to cultural, family and individual perspectives, values, and aspirations. With this in mind, the volume investigates ways in which systems and structures influence transition options. It examines both barriers to and innovative, evidence-based practices that facilitate a range of educational transitions with an emphasis on children and youth with diverse needs.

OVERVIEW OF VOLUME 18

Section One of the volume, *Transitions to and Through Schooling for ECE Primary and Elementary*, begins with a moving account by Emma Barrett describing her experience navigating inclusive school systems for three children with autism. She emphasizes the critical role parents play in negotiating optimal schooling for their children incorporating occupational therapy, classroom supports and assistance, curriculum modifications, effective learning strategies and pedagogy, and social inclusion. As she transitions two sons into early schooling Barrett invites readers into the feelings of stress, anxiety, frustration, fatigue, and yet hope, that many parents experience during transition. Parent perspectives of transition are further explored by Abdat and Gaad, who conducted research with parents in the United Arab Emirates whose children were transitioning from early care to primary education. Parents described transitions as oscillating between smooth, stressful, and blurring categories based on the challenges faced during various stages of transition and the type of settings to which the children were transitioning. The authors propose a transition framework based on three main pillars of enablers, stakeholders, and inclusive educational settings.

In order to facilitate effective early elementary transition for children with diverse needs, Beamish and Taylor introduce the Early Years-Model of Practice (EY-MoP) framework, a collection of 23 evidence-based practices to guide teachers in program planning and delivery for students on the autism spectrum, situated in three categories: *belonging, being,* and *becoming.* Each strategy utilizes a teacher-what-how format, supported by a range of easily accessible online resources. In the next chapter, Malkani and Rose explore transition from children's perspectives through a study that examined the experiences of first-generation learners who transitioned from a government school to an inclusive privately funded school in a tribal community in Maharashtra, India. Students described how the experience increased their self-confidence as learners and broadened their perceptions of future opportunities.

Section Two, *Transitions to and Through Schooling for Secondary*, begins with a parent perspective on transitioning from primary school into secondary school for a child with autism, provided by Galer who reflects on both the challenges and use of effective practices respective to the transition, with recommendations regarding the importance of obtaining an early diagnosis so that intervention strategies can be implemented at the outset of schooling and professional development provided regarding innovative and inclusive practices.

The issue of well-being is a key focus of the next chapter by Kitching and colleagues. They describe how understanding children's concerns regarding transition from primary to secondary education and the importance of well-being in educational outcomes resulted in the implementation of a successful peer mentoring program to provide opportunities for children to voice concerns regarding academic and social issues; prepare them with information, strategies, and support relationship networks for transition; and build collaborative partnerships between schools. Given the movement toward more inclusive educational placements, Forlin and Deppeler then explore a number of international programs and student support models to facilitate transition from special schools to inclusive schools for children with complex needs.

The final chapters in this section utilize case studies to describe how schools transformed teaching and learning practices. Ralston and Dally highlight that transitions don't just happen but require collaboration and commitment across an educational team to acquire knowledge and skills, and implement practices that are individualized for diverse learners. Reid continues the discussion on leadership for transition from a principal's perspective through use of several case studies that highlight teacher practices in primary and secondary schools to facilitate academic and social inclusion for students with special needs.

Section Three of the volume, *Transition to Post-Secondary Education and Vocational Opportunities*, explores various programs and interventions to foster transition into young adulthood, incorporating further education and employment. Highlighting the need to integrate career intervention across the educational system, Ginevra and colleagues describe the creation of a number of innovative of career education programs designed for children, adolescents, and young adults, with the objective of assisting students to propose a self-determined inclusive and sustainable future and acquire the skills needed for goal achievement.

Acknowledging the role of guidance counseling in preparing youth for post-secondary transitions, Banks, Aston and Shevlin examine the school guidance and transition program for students with intellectual disabilities in the Republic of Ireland through exploring the perceptions of special education needs coordinators, guidance counselors, and principals. Lack of clarity regarding role responsibility for guiding students through postsecondary transition, perceived obstacles within the transition process, and the importance of incorporating an inclusive school ethos emphasizing shared responsibility for transition planning were shared by study participants.

The California WorkAbility 1 Program is designed to equip youth with disabilities with knowledge and skills needed in the workplace through providing

paid employment opportunities to high school students. Perceptions of teachers representing various roles in the WA1 program describing the benefits and challenges of the program, as well as strategies suggested for implementing effective work transition programs are presented by Johnson. Zargarpour and Warren describe further how an intersegmental collaborative solution-building partnership, the *Regional Learning Collaboration*, was formed to facilitate transition to and through postsecondary education for vulnerable and low-income student populations in Southern California, based on the willingness to assume shared responsibility to facilitate student pathways and outcomes. Through use of a case study, van Ingen and colleagues describe how the partnership between a university and an organization that provides advocacy to persons with disabilities and their families has resulted in effective transitions to postsecondary educational settings that highlight authentic student experiences, meaningful relationships, identity formation and self-confidence, and employment prospects to the benefit of all members of the community.

Section Four of this volume proposes a number of *Collaborative Programs, Partnerships and Resources for Transition*. Underscoring the need for interagency collaborative partnerships to facilitate transition from school to adult services, Kwiatek and colleagues present the CIRCLES model, a three-team approach consisting of a community-level team, a school-level team, and a student's individualized education program team, with examples of how the model has been effectively implemented. The chapter by Azizah also proposes a collaborative interagency model designed to advance school to work transition for youth with disabilities in an Indonesian special school incorporating input from government agencies, districts, schools, students, and families. Strnadová and colleagues review stakeholders' perspectives of barriers that impact community reentry for youth transitioning from juvenile justice facilities, comparing findings of studies conducted in Australia and the United States. Pacino describes a range of programs and services developed by a library in Southern California, in partnership with various community services, to serve the transitional needs of children, youth, and adults who represent diverse populations. Finally, Mulungo discusses ways in which parent groups work in partnership with school personnel and community members to facilitate educational opportunities for children with disabilities in Malawi.

<div align="right">Kate Scorgie & Chris Forlin</div>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND GRATITUDE

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