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WORKING PAPERS IN

Early Childhood Development

48

Early childhood transitions research: A review of concepts, theory, and practice

By Pia Vogler, Gina Crivello and Martin Woodhead

Bernard van Leer Foundation

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Executive summary

Children face many important changes in the first eight years of life, including different learning centres, social groups, roles and expectations. Their ability to adapt to such a dynamic and evolving environment directly affects their sense of identity and status within their community over the short and long term. In particular, the key turning points in children's lives – such as 'graduating' from kindergarten to primary school or going through a culturally specific rite of passage – provide challenges and opportunities for learning and growth on multiple levels.

This paper provides a review of the major perspectives in research on early childhood transitions and reveals the predominant areas of focus in both academic and professional studies, as well as important neglected viewpoints and study populations. Beginning with a broad and inclusive definition of the topic, the authors provide an overview of early childhood transitions research, highlighting the underlying assumptions that informed the studies. They assess concepts in the developmental theory that preceded transitions research as well as in the logic that determines how transitions are structured. More recent approaches are examined, including systems theories and the role of children as active participants in transitions.

Several examples in this review show how multidisciplinary collaboration and culturally sensitive interventions can result in better participation of both parents and children in crucial early childhood transitions. Citing the need to harmonise early childhood education and care programmes with local education practices, the authors stress the value of greater transparency in the creation of policy and programming for children, in order to identify potentially limiting assumptions. Broadening and diversifying perspectives on transitions can lead to more integrated and culturally relevant rights-based early childhood programmes worldwide.

Introduction

Transitions are now recognised as central to young children's experiences and well-being, as well as a powerful integrative framework for research. This review surveys major conceptual tools that shed light on different aspects of early childhood transitions. The objectives are twofold: 1) to review major research perspectives on early childhood transitions and 2) to identify significant trends (and gaps) in the knowledge base of scholarly as well as professional studies. The findings of the review point to the value of widening perspectives on transitions in order to inform integrated and contextualised child-focused policy and programming.

The major purpose of the review is to assist the Bernard van Leer Foundation and its partner organisations in their efforts to foster realisation of universal child rights in culturally sensitive ways. By linking concepts, theories and practice, the review offers an accessible resource that will, we hope, have wide appeal for both researchers and practitioners concerned with early childhood transitions.

Following the working definition of General Comment 7 to the Convention on the Rights of the Child,[1] 'early childhood' is understood as the period below the age of 8 (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005: 2). Early years transitions research and policy is especially important to realising the rights of young children, as this phase of life is generally acknowledged as a period of accelerated and intense change, usually involving multiple developmental, social, and (for increasing numbers of children), institutional transitions, each of which has implications for current well-being and long-term outcomes.

The term 'transitions' has a variety of meanings that are not readily captured in a single definition. The review takes an inclusive understanding of transitions as its starting point. We aim to situate different approaches within relevant theoretical frameworks in order to highlight the underlying assumptions about childhood and child development that inform them. One generic definition would be that transitions are key events and/or processes occurring at specific periods or turning points during the life course. They are generally linked to changes in a person's appearance, activity, status, roles and relationships, as well as associated changes in use of physical and social space, and/or changing contact with cultural beliefs, discourses and practices, especially where these are linked to changes of setting and in some cases dominant language. They often involve significant psychosocial and cultural

[1] *In 2005, General Comment 7 arose out of the Committee of the Rights of the Child's concern about the lack of information being offered about early childhood and a perceived need for a discussion on the broader implications of the Convention on the Rights of the Child for young children. Through General Comment 7, the Committee wishes to encourage recognition that young children are holders of all rights enshrined in the Convention and that early childhood is a critical period for the realisation of these rights.*

adjustments with cognitive, social and emotional dimensions, depending on the nature and causes of the transition, the vulnerability or resilience of those affected and the degrees of change and continuity of experiences involved.

In practice, transition concepts are often used in much more differentiated and specific ways, for example, in terms of vertical and horizontal 'passages' (Kagan and Neuman, 1998: 366). Vertical transitions may be thought of as key changes from one state or status to another, often associated with 'upward' shifts (e.g.,, from kindergarten to primary school; from primary to secondary school, etc.). General Comment 7 as well as most research conducted within the field of education studies is primarily concerned with the kinds of vertical shifts produced within the context of formal schooling. Indeed, in many secularised societies the significant transitions of early childhood are intimately linked with educational institutions (Arnold et al., 2007: 2; UNESCO 2006: 14).

Less attention has been paid by educational researchers to what are sometimes referred to as 'education-associated transition processes' (Fabian and Dunlop, 2007: 11), those less-formal changes in children's lives and routines that occur outside institutional settings. Nonetheless, these apparently 'peripheral' changes may in fact crucially and continuously shape children's experiences and pathways, and be very 'central' in shaping children's life trajectory and well-being. Indeed, these key social transitions during the life course have been routinely studied by anthropologists working within a very different paradigm and most often within non-western societies where childhood has until recently been less decisively shaped by age-related institutions and laws. Social transitions are just as significant, seen as critical thresholds and often referred to as 'rites of passage', a term originally introduced by Van Gennep (1960). These transitions are rooted in local belief systems and typically expressed through rituals (e.g., circumcision, first communion) that may or may not be organised by formal institutions (Morrow, 2003: 268).

Horizontal transitions are less distinctive than vertical transitions and occur on an everyday basis. They refer to the movements children (or indeed any human being) routinely make between various spheres or domains of their lives (e.g., everyday movements between home and school or from one caretaking setting to another). These structure children's movement across space and over time, and into and out of the institutions that impact on their well-being.

Research on early institutional transitions has tended to conceptualise transitions as a 'one-point' event (e.g., first day at primary school). However, since the late 1990s, research directions have been shifting, with more studies understanding transitions as a multi-layered and multi-year process, involving multiple continuities and discontinuities of experience (Petriwskyj, Thorpe, Tayler, 2005: 63).

Nonetheless, transitions research continues to focus largely on modern educational institutions in Europe, the USA, Australia and New Zealand,

with major research gaps on transition practices in less-industrialised contexts. To anticipate the conclusions of the review, more studies are needed to explore the impact of educational programmes that reflect and adapt to children's diverse local environments. At the same time, studies into children's educational transitions increasingly emphasise the need to make more explicit the link between socio-cultural contexts and children's school transition experiences (e.g., Yeboah, 2002).

This review explores how a range of transitions concepts and research can inform rights-based early childhood policies and practices. It does not focus on policy and programme developments per se, but on underlying conceptualisations about transitions in early childhood. The review emerged in response to the growing need for orientation among the myriad concepts and theories in both child research and practice:

> "[P]eople often dismiss theoretical or pure research as being of no consequence for children and having no importance in the 'real' world. This attitude could not be more incorrect. Good applied research depends upon theoretical work both at the stage of developing a research project and when results are being analyzed." (Boyden and Ennew, 1997: 10)

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child corroborates the importance of theory in informing rights-based work with children:

> "Theory and evidence from early childhood research has a great deal to offer in the development of policies and practices, as well as in the monitoring and evaluation of initiatives and the education and training of all responsible for the well-being of young children" (UNCRC et al., 2006: 53).

Overview

Chapter 1 begins by outlining developmental concepts which underpin transition themes, in particular those associated with the theories of Jean Piaget and other 'stage' theorists. Their ideas are highlighted early on because so much transitions research builds on or reacts to core developmental assumptions. Chapter 1 then introduces socio-cultural perspectives on early childhood transitions. These are distinguished by their focus on how children learn by interacting with their immediate socio-cultural environments (e.g., caregivers, peers). This emphasis has been elaborated by several disciplines within the social sciences and is increasingly mirrored in early child development programmes around the world.

Chapter 2 examines the different ways in which transitions are structured, drawing attention to varying logics that can be employed to mark transitions in early childhood. Institutional settings often use biological age as the criterion for readiness. By contrast, socio-cultural transitions are often marked through rites of passage, following the cultural and economic reasoning of a given community. Also, around the world children engage in horizontal transitions as they move between different domains of everyday life.

Chapter 3 shifts to perspectives on transitions that are informed by systems theories. These are distinguished from socio-cultural approaches by their greater emphasis on the links between individuals, macro social processes and historical changes. These approaches highlight the linkages between children, their communities and global societies and draw attention to the importance of comprehensive programmes that enable children to engage critically with the demands of a changing environment.

Chapter 4 focuses on children's active roles in shaping their transition experiences, with particular attention to the significance of peer group relationships as a moderating influence on transitions. The section then explores research methods that may enable the implementation of children's right to participation within research and programming in this area.

The final chapter discusses the findings of this review, highlighting significant research strengths and gaps of the various approaches presented, followed by a glossary of key transitions concepts discussed in the paper.

Chapter 1: Development and transition

Conceptualisations of transition are almost invariably underpinned by theories about children's development, especially as informed by developmental psychology. Development is a foundational concept for early childhood policy and practice, and it is also central to realising children's rights. The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) draws heavily on the concept of development both as a substantive right (Article 6) and as a standard against which to protect children from harmful experiences (e.g., Article 32) (Woodhead, 2005). Developmental theories necessarily engage with concepts of transition, even if not explicitly. Development is all about processes of individual growth, change and transformation, and it is frequently conceptualised in terms of moving through a sequence of age-approximate stages.

At the same time, 'development' is a very wide-ranging concept, permitting multiple theoretical interpretations, with each theory suggesting different ways to understand personal transitions. We begin by briefly summarising some features of Jean Piaget's 'constructivist theory', which has been most influential through the elaboration of stages of human development. Other notable stage theorists include Lawrence Kohlberg (1981) on moral development and Erik Erikson (1950) on personal and social development.

Developmental stages as transitions

Developmental stage theory is epitomised by Piaget's ideas, especially as these have been enthusiastically taken up by educational theorists and curriculum planners. Broadly speaking, early child development is seen as a natural and universal process of progressive transformations (or stages) in children's physical, mental, cognitive, socio-emotional and moral competencies. These transformations are driven by the interactions between maturational processes and children's progressive structuring and restructuring of their experiences, as they gradually acquire more sophisticated capacities for thinking and reasoning. Stage theorists were typically guided by the hypothesis that the sequence of stages is invariant and universal, and this prompted extensive cross-cultural research during the 1960s and 1970s to compare children's capacities on Piaget's tasks across diverse cultural settings. Piaget (1978) envisaged these psychological stages as driven by a process of equilibration. He suggested that children develop schemata to represent their understanding of the world, and that they try to assimilate the world to these schemata until too much external contradiction forces a change and re-equilibration of their world view (Lourenco and Machado, 1996: 149). The implication of seeing child development as a series of progressive psychological transformations, from one stage to the next, from infancy to maturity, is that these stages become crucial reference points for discussing optimal timing for transitions, e.g., from home to pre-school or from more informal to more formal curriculum.

During the 20th century, Piaget's early writing, as well as partial readings of his work, were popularised and globalised. This diffused version of Piagetian theory was often stripped of the subtleties and complexities of his original work. Yet, it is the simplifications of the theory that have fed into the predominant framework for welfare and education programmes, as well as child legislation (Boyden, 1997: 197). For example, debates surrounding the concept and assessment of children's readiness for learning and/or readiness for school are strongly fed by developmental ideas. These debates are in turn influential on beliefs about a child's readiness to make successful transitions. The concept of readiness appeared in the educational literature during the 1920s. Promoted by developmentalists, readiness for learning was regarded as the level of development at which the individual has the capacity to undertake the learning of specific material – usually the age at which the average group of individuals has the specified capacity (Good, 1973). By contrast, readiness for school is a more finite construct, embracing specific cognitive and linguistic skills. Irrespective of academic domain, school readiness typically sanctions standards of physical, intellectual and social development considered sufficient to enable children to fulfil school requirements (Scott-Little et al., 2006). Early specifications of developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programmes were also strongly informed by stage-based theories (e.g., Bredekamp, 1987).

The influence of developmental ideas cannot be underestimated: "Developmental psychology can be seen as a discourse which not only contributes to the construction of our images of children and our understanding of children's needs, but also to the construction and constitution of the whole childhood landscape" (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence 1999: 36). For example, under the developmental paradigm the dialogue revolving around young children's needs and provision rarely viewed them as rights-holders with their own views and perspectives. Instead very young children have often been perceived as objects of benevolence and passive recipients of care (UNCRC et al., 2006: 31–32).

Although developmental stage theories were for many decades the dominant framework for understanding children's transitions, especially amongst progressive child-centred educationists, a growing body of research and theory across the social sciences contributed to a shift in the academic perception of children and childhood. One influential alternative to stage theory came from within developmental psychology itself, building on the ideas of Lev Vygotsky (e.g., Rogoff, 2003). Another influential strand of theory came from the new sociology of childhood, which has fuelled the critique of the developmental paradigm itself (e.g., Qvortrup 1994, James and Prout 1997, Woodhead, in press). One of the main areas of critique has surrounded theoretical positioning of children as human 'becomings' rather than human 'beings', in other words, as competent and active participants in society from birth (summarised by Uprichard, 2008).

General Comment 7 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child has taken into account this

growing body of research and recognises that currently more is known about the capacities and the development of infants and young children than was known during the 1980s when the working group drafted the Convention:

> "Research in the last decades has impressively confirmed that children from an early age are explorers with boundless curiosity and that they are judicious decision makers and social actors each with their own unique goals, interests and ways to communicate feelings and intentions" (Doek, Krappmann and Lee, 2006: 32).

These new understandings of children's active participation in social activities call for an approach to child development that emphasises the plurality of developmental pathways and children's roles in influencing their own development (Estep, 2002: 143).

Transitions as socio-cultural learning processes

Socio-cultural learning refers to the diverse ways in which caregivers and communities enable children to achieve mastery of culturally acknowledged and valued behaviour. While the process of socio-cultural learning exists everywhere, the goals of these learning processes vary within communities and historical periods. This perspective does not deny the significance of universal maturational processes, but encourages closer examination of the meaning of ethnotheories[2] and the contexts that inform childhood transitions and rites of passage.

As noted above, the origins of this approach are in part to be found within social constructivist (or socio-cultural) perspectives (Woodhead, 1998). Vygotskian theory breaks from traditional developmental psychology by focusing on the importance of social interaction. It emphasises activity, rather than the individual, as the basic unit of analysis. This more dynamic vision of child development offers a relational view on transitions. In this view, children are actively involved in the timing and quality of their transition experiences. Vygotskian socio-cultural psychology has the advantage of recognising all aspects of childhood as shaped by social, cultural and economic processes. This also applies to children's environments, whether these are within the home, the farm, or a pre-school setting (Woodhead, 1999a: 9).

Like Piaget, Vygotsky viewed children as active agents in their own environment, engaging with the world around them, and in some senses, creating for themselves the circumstances of their own development. Where the two theorists differ is in the emphasis given by Vygotsky to the role of cultural and social processes in learning and development. Vygotsky understands learning as a process that results in development. In this respect, he clearly differs from Piagetian

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[2] *Ethnotheories represent emic views on childhood as well as beliefs about what activities are reasonable for children to carry out and how these fit into the wider set of social practices. Interestingly, what transpires from different ethnographies on child-rearing practices is the existence of similarities in cross-cultural ethnotheories with regard to the position of children within the human life course, as in respect to major points of transitions during youth. At the same time, this research also underscores the high degree of diversity in terms of developmental goals and socializing strategies (Boyden, Ling and Myers, 1998: 32-35).*

approaches, which stress that a certain developmental stage has to be reached in order to learn (Feldman and Fowler, 197: 1999). The transition between learning and development occurs in the so-called 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1978), referring to the distance between the most difficult task a child can perform without help and the most difficult task s/he can do with support. It is therefore through the instruction from teachers, adults and more skilled peers that children learn and develop. Post-Vygotskian researchers developed the idea of 'scaffolding' to capture the assistance children receive from their peers and adult instructors in reaching new developmental goals (Wood et al., 1976). In order to scaffold a child, parents, teachers and peers use tools and signs as mediators to transmit knowledge and practical routines. Developmental goals, as well as the mediating tools, are all culturally defined (Estep, 2002: 152; Mooney, 2000: 83–84). In a similar vein, the concept of 'guided participation' in cultural activities highlights how children can learn to think and to develop new skills and more mature approaches to problem solving with guidance from more skilled peers, siblings, and adults (Rogoff et al., 1998: 227).

Transitions can be understood as key moments within the process of socio-cultural learning whereby children change their behaviour according to new insights gained through social interaction with their environment. This chapter explores frameworks that are informed by socio-cultural theory, namely 'developmental niche' (Super and Harkness, 1986) and 'guided participation' (Rogoff, 1990). The section concludes by looking at the significance of inter-generational influences.

Developmental niche

The idea of a 'developmental niche' refers to the combination of: 1) caregivers' belief systems (ethnotheories) regarding child-rearing, 2) the material conditions and, in particular, the spatial arrangements, of child-rearing, and 3) the actual practices of child-rearing. At the centre of the model rests the individual child (Super and Harkness, 1986: 552), and although it is very family- and child-centred,[3] it does not look at wider social effects (unlike ecological models; see below). The three sub-systems of the developmental niche represent the way individual children's worlds are arranged and are related to the wider cultural environment. In this view, children contribute to the construction of their developmental niches through their own expectations and through their interaction with their caregivers.

The 'developmental niche' approach has mostly been used to study early child-rearing practices in relation to local beliefs and customs,

[3] 'The child' *is also at the centre of analysis of other conceptual models. For example, although Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory focuses much more on social constraints than the developmental niche approach, 'the child' remains at the centre of analysis.*

***Example:* GEAR UP**

Applied to formal transitions to institutions, the developmental-niche-approach encourages researchers to examine settings, customs, and ethnotheories both at home and in care contexts in order to unveil cultural differences between these spaces. For example, Harkness and colleagues (2005) have been using the concept to explore pathways and transitions between home and school of inner city children in Hartford (Connecticut, USA). Starting in 1999, researchers followed two cohorts of children in the sixth and seventh grades in a pre-kindergarten through eighth grade school. This school took part in the University of Connecticut's GEAR UP project, a federally funded program to support children in completing high school and continuing their education. At the time of the intervention, 64% of the students were Hispanic, 22% African American, and the others Caucasian, Asian or Native American. 67% came from non-English-speaking homes. (Harkness et al., 2005: 341–342)

First, researchers acquainted themselves with families involved in the project through home visits and interviews which provided qualitative and quantitative indicators of children's cultural and educational backgrounds, parents' concerns and their engagement with their child's school. Exploring children's home and school developmental niches demonstrated that pupils experienced considerable discontinuities between those two spaces.

After these initial assessments, researchers proposed interventions shaped by the developmental niche framework. As the framework places emphasis on children within their families, it was assumed that any intervention has to target children as well as their caregivers. Thus, the set-up of a mentoring system became a crucial component of the GEAR UP project. The intervention proved very helpful in increasing students' scholastic and social competence. Similar to the Vygotskian concept of 'scaffolding', support of either official mentors and/or competent peers transpired to improve individual children's school performance. Moreover, mentors met with parents and thus fostered parental interest and involvement in school matters. Furthermore, the GEAR UP project initiated a variety of after-school activities in order to improve the relationship between children, their caregivers and the school. Through the participation of younger siblings, parents became increasingly involved in these activities. Interestingly, researchers also came to understand that their previous involvement with parents through home visits and interviews was actually an intervention in itself. It was only through these home visits that many parents realised their opinions would be taken into account. Children also seemed to welcome the presence of GEAR UP project-related persons to their homes and their participation to project-related activities reportedly increased as a result of the interviews and home visits (Harkness et al., 2005: 350).

illustrated by LeVine's research amongst the Gusii of Kenya (Le Vine et al., 1994). He reports that, traditionally, high birth and mortality rates placed a premium on early nurturance, with close physical contact, demand feeding and sleeping next to the mother. This nurturant style did not incorporate high levels of playful stimulation; mothers remained aloof, with little joint activity or verbal communication. At the same time, managing a large family as well as cultivating the fields put pressure on the mother as caregiver and necessitated a significant contribution from her children. The baby would be entrusted to the care of an older sibling, and by the age of 3 would already be expected to carry out small domestic chores. Deference to elders and obedience to instructions was emphasised; praise offered sparingly. LeVine et al. compare the Gusii infant's experience with a child in Boston, whose survival is virtually assured and whose relationships are marked by reciprocity and mutual responsiveness. Children are provided with plenty of psychological space, they are encouraged to assert their individuality, and clashes of will are tolerated and in moderation seen as a sign of healthy development (as summarised in Woodhead, 1998). These very different niches for early childhood are highly significant in their own right, but they also have very different implications for the transitions children might make to different settings or contexts, through migration, starting school, etc.; these new settings represent a very different developmental niche, governed by different values, goals and expectations.

Guided participation

The concept of 'guided participation' emphasises both the active engagement of children in their social world, as well as the role of adults and peers in guiding children towards full participation in culturally valued activities. While the process of guided participation is universal, it differs according to the degree of communication between children and their caregivers, as well as in the skills expected from mature community members (Rogoff, 1990: 190). The 'guided participation' concept expands Vygotsky's understanding of 'zone of proximal development' (which focused mainly on cultural mediation through language and literacy) by highlighting the role of tacit forms of communication and practical activities in encouraging child development. Rogoff emphasises that children are constantly engaged in an appropriation of culture even when they are seemingly passive (e.g., eavesdropping and observation), as well as through active participation: "Instead of viewing children as separate entities that become capable of social involvement, we may consider children as being inherently engaged in the social world even *from before birth*, advancing throughout development in their skill in independently carrying out and organising activities of their culture" (Rogoff, 1990: 22).

Developmental transitions, within this framework, relate to the gradual mastery of cultural tools. This view contrasts with stage

theories, where transitions appear more like once-for-all transformations in cognitive and psychosocial functioning. The guidance of culturally competent peers and adults as well as the mediation of culturally meaningful symbols allows children to become more confident in their ability to perform culturally valued routines and activities and in their acquired skills. These 'repertoires of practice' reflect deep-seated cultural dispositions and are difficult to change: "People's repertoires of practice describe the formats they are likely to employ in upcoming situations, based on their own prior experience in similar settings. Repertoires of practice are highly constrained by people's opportunities and access to participate directly or vicariously in settings and activities where particular formats are employed" (Rogoff et al., 2005: 27).

Inter-generational influences on transitions

Both developmental niche and guided participation approaches highlight the role of caregiver influence in cultural reproduction and child development and well-being. Inter-generational influences encompass more than biological caregivers, and may come from children's cultural interactions with parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, teachers, neighbours, religious leaders and other adults. Those adults with whom children spend the most time and/or whom they have fashioned as their 'role models' (or 'anti-role' models) may have greater impact on children's orientations and transitions; and who they spend the most time with – at home, in institutional contexts, at play, etc. – may alter over the course of childhood.

The impact of parents and family members on children's school outcomes was illustrated by a study carried out on seven African countries by Lloyd and Blanc (1996, cited in Lloyd et al., 2005). They found that variations in children's schooling outcomes could be explained by the resources of the child's residential household, particularly the standard of living and the education of the head of household. When comparing households with similar resources, children living in female-headed households were found to fare better than children in male-headed households in terms of school outcomes. In many developing country contexts, household relationships are characterised by the interdependency of its various members, which may be reinforced by deep-seated notions of respect and obligation and by financial necessity.

Decisions around which childhood transitions are important when, for which children exactly, and who gets involved, are negotiated across generations and reflect particular visions and cultural representations of childhood and child development. Whether the child is male or female, or eldest or youngest, and his or her phase in the life course will shape expectations of who gets involved – and in which ways – at key transition points. To illustrate, there has been a relatively recent surge in interest in the specific roles that fathers play in their children's development and well-being, though such studies tend to be focused in industrialised country contexts. For example, in the US, it was only in the 1970s that a scholarly interest in fatherhood emerged and social policies targeting fathers expanded, Marsiglio and colleagues note

in a review in the Journal of Marriage and the Family (2000). Since then, research has moved beyond focusing on the limited role of fathers as 'breadwinners' or in terms of their deficits (i.e., 'deadbeat dads', absent fathers, concern with 'female-headed households', etc.) with greater focus on the positive impacts they have on their children's lives. Major changes in family life and organisation have highlighted the diversity of fatherhood and have opened a space for examining fathers' potentially unique contribution to child development (Marsiglio, p. 1174).

In their review, Marsiglio and colleagues pointed to the 1990s as the decade in which US interest in the study of fatherhood intensified, reflected in the number of national surveys that added questions to their instruments to capture fathers' involvement and experiences of fatherhood (p. 1174). Survey examples include the a) Panel Study of Income Dynamics, b) National Survey of Labor Market Experience – Youth, c) National Survey of Adolescent Males, d) National Survey of Families and Households, and e) National Survey of Family Growth. The Developing a Daddy Survey project draws on six national studies to study father involvement, including a) the Early Head Start Evaluation – Fatherhood Component, b) the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Birth Cohort and c) the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. Though limited to survey studies, these efforts represent an increasing interest in understanding the distinct influences different adults – in this case, fathers – have on the their children's lives.

There is relatively less research on father's involvement in developing country contexts (Engle and Breaux, 1998). Understanding the different ways in which fathers, mothers, grandparents, older siblings, etc. contribute to children's transitions – as decision-makers, sources of material or emotional support, and as role models (or 'anti'-role models) – can inform local programmes aimed to support children's transitions experiences and well-being.

Summary

This section began with an overview of developmental stage theories that provided an influential underpinning for understanding major changes during childhood, and have in turn been highly influential on policies and practices surrounding children's transitions. Socio-cultural theories, which offer an alternative perspective, have been illustrated through the specific concepts of 'developmental niche' and 'guided participation'. These concepts, along with a brief review of inter-generational influences, are strong reminders that cultural values, belief systems and relationships shape assumptions about child-rearing practices, developmental goals, and the methods aimed to reach them, as well as the basis upon which children's progress is assessed.

In General Comment 7, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child reflected this awareness of culturally diverse child-rearing goals and practices and encouraged those working with young children to "draw on beliefs and

Examples: Programmes that link formal education with the learning of culturally valued skills

The Grandmother Project (Senegal)

The Grandmother Project (www.grandmotherproject.org) is an international non-profit organisation based in the USA and Italy which was set up in 2004 in order to actively involve grandmothers in community health and early childhood education programmes. The project acknowledges grandmothers' experience and contribution to child and family well-being as well as their exclusion from programme models that ignore local culture (Ageways, 2007). It supports community-based organisations and non-governmental organisations to learn grandmother-inclusive approaches and plan and implement programmes that feature grandmothers as key actors. In southern Senegal, West Africa, the Grandmother Project developed a booklet on the role of grandmothers in the local culture for use in literacy classes and schools. It aimed to bridge the gap between young and old, and between the domains of home and school. The project director, Judi Aubel, said, "Teachers tend to have a bias against grandparents because they didn't go to school. Even if your ultimate goal is to reach children, you need first to work with teachers to change their attitude (p. 9)." In addition, older people involved in the project reported an increase in self-confidence; as one grandmother said, "I have never seen a book that talks about our role in society. It is true what it says that we do all that we can to ensure the well-being of the family. But usually our role isn't recognised." (p. 9)

Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja (ABEK) (Uganda)

ABEK is an early childhood programme funded by different organisations, including the Bernard van Leer Foundation and Save the Children. It illustrates how the provision of children's basic education is adapted to community and livelihood practices. The programme aims to facilitate children's transition from informal to formal schooling in pastoral communities in Uganda. By adapting teaching to pastoral lifestyles, the programme managed to change parental attitudes towards education. Importantly, the programme respected the particularities of the community by teaching under trees at suitable hours so that learning would not interfere with domestic chores. Also, curricula are taught by community members. Importantly, teaching combines the transmission of formal knowledge (e.g. reading, writing, numeracy, etc.) in relation to indigenous knowledge and culturally valued life skills (Chelimo, 2006: 36–37).

Opportunity for Poor Children (OPC) (Mae Hong Son, Thailand)

OPC is a community-based organisation committed to the promotion of child rights and illustrates the notion of `guided participation' through the culturally valued work they do with migrant children. OPC provides shelter, security and education for numerous Burmese migrant children between 5 and 15 years old who are living separated from their working parents in Mae Hong Son. Apart from schooling and accommodation, OPC provides students with culturally valued skills such as cooking and farming, as the centre has a garden and rears pigs and chickens. The students work to tend the crops and animals, learning as they do the skills under the guidance of more experienced peers and adults. In this way, migrant children become familiar with organic subsistence farming of mushrooms, potatoes, garlic and other crops, animal rearing (pigs) as well as the production of soy bean meal and tofu, which are important basic foods. Teaching migrant children both literary and culturally valued skills proves to be an important complement to education and may also provide them with prospects for future economic gain and employment.

knowledge about early childhood in ways that are appropriate to local circumstances and changing practices, and respect traditional values, provided these are not discriminatory (art. 2), nor prejudicial to children's health and well-being (art. 24.3.), nor against their best interests (art. 3)" (UNCRC, 2006: 38). Furthermore, the Committee expanded in General Comment 7 its definition of education by insisting that every child has a right to education, beginning from birth. In this sense, education is being understood in a much broader sense than schooling or pre-school, and requires a comprehensive community effort to support children through their early and middle childhoods (Woodhead and Moss, 2007: 2). These concerns for implementing young children's rights in ways that are contextually appropriate reinforce the importance of understanding the local child development circumstances, goals and available resources, and differential involvement of family members in key transitions, in order best to support children as they experience key life changes.

Chapter 2: The structure of transitions

If we understand transitions as key events or processes of change over the life course, it is important to make transparent the ways these changes are defined and shaped in terms of social structures and institutional processes. In industrialised societies, childhood transitions are often conceived as developmental processes structured by educational institutions, for example, as in the organisation of cohorts of same-age children as first graders in school. In this thinking, schooling is an assumed universal feature of childhood, and biological age is widely treated as a proxy for readiness, maturation and competence. Yet, in many parts of the world where birthdates are not recorded and schooling still far from universal, biological age is not the most important structuring factor for transitions in childhood. Instead, social class or caste as well as gender and birth order may be determinants of children's daily activities, life changes and expectations for present and future development (Woodhead, in press). Non-age-graded perspectives on transitions may capture the context of relevant passages, as well as children's strategic actions for adaptation during these stages. Such a perspective would, on the one hand, pay attention to one-time and usually 'irreversible' passages (e.g., circumcision, first entry into school), as well as transitions that occur on a regular basis (e.g., the horizontal movements between primary school, home and farming fields).

This section begins by looking at the structure of institutional transitions, with particular attention to the ways children's age and their gender function as social markers shaping the way they experience and negotiate educational settings. Next, two conceptual frameworks are introduced which consider transitions as culturally anchored movements between periods and spheres of life. These vertical and horizontal movements are respectively captured by the concepts of 'rites of passage' (e.g., first school day) and 'border crossings' (e.g., daily movements between home and school).

Age and gender in institutional transitions

There is increasing awareness that inflexible, institutional school structures with fixed age-grade systems and associated aged-linked curricula and assessment systems do not respect the diversity of children's developmental pathways, nor the variations in their evolving capacities (Lansdown, 2005). Although the political momentum towards Education for All has resulted in greater numbers of young children enrolling in pre-schools and schools, the timing of institutional transitions in early childhood varies across countries and regions according to how the primary school system is organised at the local level. Many other socio-cultural, institutional and economic factors influence views on admission ages, and on the organisation of age and gender cohorts. In some countries, the transition from pre-school to primary school may occur as early as age 4, whereas in other places, children experience this

transition around age 7. In some countries, early education and care programmes are seen as an integral first stage within the school system; while in other countries, they are a separate (and frequently diverse) sector (Woodhead and Moss, 2007: 44).

Despite this awareness, child-focused policy and practice generally conceive of childhood transitions as appropriately timed achievements of developmental milestones within educational institutions. For example, within the field of early childhood education, the term 'transition' is mostly used to define the move from one year group to the next or from one school to another, within formal educational settings (Fabian and Dunlop, 2002: 3).

Age 'defines' stages of childhood more powerfully in Western societies, with annual birthday parties commonplace for many children, and school entry determined by date of birth. This trend has been globalised through initiatives such as Education for All. Nonetheless, in many communities, age since birth is not recorded and people often refer to relative seniority as the measure of development, or link their birth to particular historical events affecting their community (Rogoff, 2003: 154). For example, in Burundi and Tanzania, there are six different names to refer to phases within childhood, with transitions between them marked by the gradual assumption of new responsibilities within their families and communities (Eggers, 1997: 143; Morrow, 2003: 272).

Indeed, channelling children's transitions into biologically timed processes through educational systems is a relatively recent phenomenon. Concern for the timing of childhood transitions originated in the USA and the UK with the introduction of child labour laws and compulsory schooling at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries (Cunningham, 1991: 194; Cunningham and Viazzo, 1996: 6; Zelizer, 1985: 6). Child labour laws aimed at curbing children's entry into the workforce and the establishment of a standard school entry age facilitated the organisational thinking surrounding pupils' transition through school grades in terms of 'batches', 'cohorts' or 'peer groups'. While grade progression has generally been age-based in education systems (e.g., the UK), in many others progression has been determined by achievement, and grade repetition has been common. As noted earlier, debates surrounding school admission and progression became linked with concerns for 'readiness' for school, 'developmental appropriateness' of curricula and 'retardation' in learning.

Policy debates around age of school transitions continue to this day. For example, in the UK the so-called 'birth date effect' has been widely debated since the 1970s. Put simply, discussions revolve around the question whether or not summer-born children are disadvantaged at the point of transition to school because they attend pre-primary education for a shorter period of time as well as being less mature than their autumn-born peers (e.g., Bell and Daniels 1990). Research literature surrounding organisation of school starting ages is extensive, premised on cultural conventions surrounding the labelling of children as 'pre-school', 'kindergarten', 'reception class', 'first grade', and so on.

Children's chronological age has become a powerful social marker shaping children's lives in the modern world, linked as it is to ideas about stages and developmental readiness. But age-related constructs do not function in isolation. Like adults, children are complex social beings who, from the time they are born, take on identities based on multiple markers including gender, ethnicity, class or caste, etc. as well as age (Brooker and Woodhead, 2008). In some communities, gender constructs are virtually inseparable from age constructs in determining for example, what is viewed appropriate for a 5-year-old girl versus a 5-year-old boy. In the past, as well as in some contemporary societies, gender was a major factor determining whether children attended school, as well as the kinds of schooling, curriculum and teaching considered appropriate. In the same way, just as many childhood rites of passage are gender-specific, children's experiences of institutional transitions may also be shaped by their gender. This isn't just a question of cultural attitudes shaping adults' expectations and behaviour towards children. Children themselves appropriate and negotiate gender identity from an early age, especially through their interactions with their peers, at pre-school and elsewhere in their social worlds (MacNaughton, 2000; Danby and Baker, 1998).

Especially as children mature and near puberty, differences between boys and girls may become heightened. Classrooms can be contexts where stereotypical gender differences are reinforced by teachers and peers, even where official policies emphasise equal opportunities. These problems may be amplified in low-resourced schools in many developing country contexts, where multi-grade, mixed-gender classrooms are common. For example, in a study of the abuse of girls in African schools, Leach et al. (2003: viii) reported that schools in Ghana and Malawi "are a breeding ground for potentially damaging gendered practices, the influence of which will stay with pupils into adult life". According to this report, "sexual aggression goes largely unpunished, dominant male behaviour by both pupils and teachers is not questioned, and pupils are strongly encouraged to conform to the gender roles and norms of interaction which they observe around them". The latter is also evidenced in resource-poor contexts, where teachers often require pupils to carry out menial tasks that are assigned in ways that reinforce gender differences. Girls, for example, may be asked to clean floors and toilets and fetch water, while boys are required to carry bricks and cut grass. Such practices may be less prevalent in classrooms of very young children, but intensify with age.

As an example, Jha and Kelleher (2006: 92) describe research aimed to explain boys' underachievement in Jamaica. The authors point out that while gender parity indices have improved for girls in recent years, boys are underperforming, particularly at the secondary level and in their progression to post-secondary and tertiary education (p. 82). They describe how local concepts of masculinity and socialisation processes that foster greater supervision of girls and less supervision of boys have led to a lowering of boy's self-esteem and alienated them from the values of high academic achievement.

Social transitions as rites of passage

The expression 'rite of passage' is widely used in everyday language, as a way to describe significant transition events during the life course. The concept was introduced nearly a century ago by Arnold van Gennep in his book *Les rites de passage* (1908).[4] Van Gennep was primarily interested in the sequence of rites as markers of life changes such as birth, name giving, maturity and death. He was convinced that human development consists of a series of passages that are *universal* in form and *cultural* in content (Hockey, 2002: 212).

According to Van Gennep, transitions are dynamic processes which follow a threefold sequential pattern: First, preliminal rites ('rites of separation' from a previous 'world'), second, liminal or threshold rites (performed during the transitional stage) and third, postliminal rites marking an individual's re-incorporation into the world with a new status (Van Gennep, 1960: 21). These ideas were taken up by Victor Turner who was particularly interested in liminality as the phase when persons are "betwixt and between" structured stages of their life course (Turner, 1969: 95). Because of the focus on different stages, a 'rites of passage'-perspective examines the whole process of transition, not just specific marker events referred to in everyday usage.

Rites of passage often refer to shifts in social status and indicate readiness (or social expectations) to take on new responsibilities. They are frequently related to an individual's 'social age', rather than to their biological age. In other words, the timing of cultural rites of passage may depend on a variety of factors such as socio-economic class or caste status, gender and birth order, and will be strongly shaped by the extent of modernisation and secularisation of a society (Van Gennep, 1960: 66–67).

Young children are often at the centre of rites of passage marking shifts in their status within the community, both in terms of essential personhood (i.e., becoming 'fully human') and as social beings. It may not be important that a very young child experiencing a rite of passage is relatively unaware of the status change, as these events are essentially about social participation, recognition and affirming old and new relationships.

Rites of passage in early childhood vary across contexts in scale and formality, and in some cases, such as the American 'baby shower', which is usually celebrated either shortly before childbirth or a few weeks after the child is born, may be as much about affirming the mother's status as it is about 'welcoming' the baby. In the Peruvian Andes, the relationship between the newborn and their social world is at the fore of the *unuchakuy* ritual, which introduces the child to godparents and to a sacred mountain believed to be a force of protection throughout the child's life (Bolin, 2006: 14). Ceremonial naming is another way of marking transition in

[4] *The book was translated into English in 1960.*

the early years; among the Maasai, this happens for boys and girls at around 6 months of age when they also get their first hair cut *(embarnoto e nkerai/enkidunkoto e nkaran)*. Among some Jewish families, boys' third birthdays are marked by the *upsherin* ceremony, which involves the ritual first haircut and is also meant to signal their initiation into formal religious education.

In Burma, boys' transition to adolescence is related to their Buddhist initiation. This comprises a formal ceremony followed by a temporary withdrawal into monastic life while wearing a yellow robe. Destitute households are often unable to save the money for this ceremony; therefore, it is not uncommon for poor boys to make this transition experience late or sometimes not at all. In contrast, some boys are initiated at a relatively young age when their older sisters are due for their own ceremonies which must coincide with that of their brothers, and without which the girls cannot enter into marriage (Spiro, 1982: 234–235).

In Tanzania, the timing of traditional rites of passage has been changing due to modern medical technologies and compulsory schooling. Circumcision ceremonies, for example, are often conducted at the beginning of holidays, so as not to interfere with schooling. Nevertheless, the rite continues to convey traditional initiation messages about 'making each other pregnant' which some children apparently put into practice following initiation training (Morrow, 2003: 272–273).

The 'rites of passage' framework has also been applied to formal institutional transitions by Lam and Pollard (2006) in their study of children's transition to kindergarten in Hong Kong. They used a holistic approach, integrating rites of passage concepts with those from Vygotskian socio-cultural theory. They also draw on the concept of 'pupil careers' to explore positive outcomes of transitions (Woods and Pollard, 1988). They identify three components of 'pupil careers': 1) patterns of formal (academic) and informal (social) outcomes, 2) strategic action, and 3) an evolving sense of domain-identity. Strategic action refers here to children's own contributions to becoming members of the new school culture (e.g., through interaction with friends). Domain-identity refers, in the case of school, to children's understanding of themselves as 'pupils'. Although children are physically part of and present in the school system on a nearly daily basis, it may take several weeks or months for them to grow into their new 'domain identity' or pupil role (Lam and Pollard, 2006: 135–136).

The authors use 'rites of passage' to describe the phases of children's transition to kindergarten, drawing on socio-cultural theory to discern how competent members at home and in kindergarten (e.g., parents, teachers, experienced peers) guide children with cultural mediation tools (communication, play, routines, etc.) through their transition process. The preliminal stage relates to children's separation from their caregivers at home as they learn to be pupils in a classroom. The liminal stage starts with transition practices or programmes that inaugurate children into becoming pupils. This phase entails a spatial passage (from home to

kindergarten, for example) as well as a status passage (integrating pupil with child status). The liminal transition process of learning to become a pupil is characterised by ambiguity and transformation, as children are not yet fully integrated into the new pupil status. The postliminal stage is reached at the end of the transition process when children have adapted their new pupil identity (Lam and Pollard, 2006: 131–132).

William Corsaro's notion of 'priming events' also has a ritual character, echoing aspects of rites of passage theory. Priming events are interactive and symbolic activities that allow children and their social environment to contribute actively to their experiences of change.[5] For example, in their ethnographic study of a school setting in Modena, Italy, Corsaro and Molinari show how priming events at the end of kindergarten are public and widely attended gatherings where children, their families, and local politicians and other community members join in the events. Such a public ritual represents a break from everyday routine and is meant to signal to the children (and others) that it is time for them to move on. For parents and the organisers of these events, there is a civic pride in celebrating the lives of the children and to see them growing up and becoming more involved members of society. Also, for younger siblings, participating in these events may be a kind of priming activity that makes them anticipate the moment when it will be their turn to be in the spotlight (Corsaro and Molinari, 2005: 18).

Daily transitions as border crossings

The concept of rites of passage normally refers to the cultural marking of once-for-all life course transitions, sometimes also called 'vertical transitions', to contrast with 'horizontal transitions' that occur on a daily and even momentary basis (Kagan and Neuman, 1998). Sue Campbell Clark (2000) introduced the notion of 'border crossing' to describe adults' routine movements backwards and forwards between home and the workplace, but this concept can equally be applied to young children's daily experiences of moving between home, pre-school and other everyday settings. The concept provides a framework to describe how borders are controlled and managed and how individuals integrate and separate different domains of their daily lives. Campbell Clark underscores the role of supportive communication in minimising cross-domain conflicts that may arise when individuals frequently move between two very different worlds (p. 764).

Indeed, research on early childhood transitions suggests that, similar to adult border crossers, young children experience identity shifts when moving between domains. Identity shifts may comprise changes in roles, dress and behaviour, as well as activities and ways of communicating. Border crossers can be either peripheral or

[5] *See also Chapter 4.*

central participants to a domain. Central participants have internalised the culture and values of a domain, which allows them to successfully perform the activities that are valued within it and to interact with other central domain members. Balance between two domains is best achieved when border crossers manage to identify with their roles in both spaces (Campbell Clark, 2000: 759–761). It is therefore important to examine the complexity and the relationships between contexts, expectations, and subjectivities. These concerns draw attention to issues of home-school cooperation as well as continuity issues when children change from one educational setting to another (Woodhead and Moss, 2007).

Example: Children Crossing Borders

Children Crossing Borders is a cross-cultural and multi-national study currently being conducted in five countries (England, France, Germany, Italy and the United States) over a three-year period (2006–9). The study focuses on how immigrant children are being served by their early childhood care and education (ECCE) systems and what their parents want for their children in ECCE settings. It follows the approach taken by Tobin, Wu and Davidson in their study `Preschools in Three Cultures.' The method entails creating videotapes of typical days in classrooms of four-year-olds in ECCE settings in the study countries. Key stakeholders (including parents, teachers, administrators, childhood education experts and policy-makers, etc.) in each of the study countries are shown the same set of videos in order to highlight similarities and differences in ECCE systems and to encourage dialogue and debate. The study's link to 'borders' and 'domains' is clear. On the one hand, it addresses issues of conflict and continuity in relation to differences between family domains and ECCE settings. On the other hand, the study also points to the cultural borders that immigrant families and children face as ECCE settings may be the first context in which they confront such differences. (See www.childrencrossingborders.org)

Example: RICA Project

Evidence from the RICA Project (2005–2006) on successful transitions to first grade in Nicaragua highlights the effectiveness of working towards the interconnectedness of different domains. The project consisted on the one hand of interventions aimed to bring school physically and psychologically closer to children's homes. On the other hand, project interventions addressed teachers in raising awareness about children's needs. Moreover, the programme focused on the expansion of pre-school and primary school coverage in previously unattended zones, monthly support sessions to stimulate parental participation in schools, dissemination of knowledge on child development among community leaders, and awareness-raising workshops for teachers and headmasters on the particular needs of children from disadvantaged sectors. Programme outcomes have been rewarding. After one year, children's attendance of pre-school during four of five days increased from 65% to 94%. Moreover, pre-school children's performance increased with 56% achieving the expected development level in reading, writing and arithmetic, compared with 35% in the same schools during the previous year (Save the Children US, 2007).

Summary

This chapter has pointed to three different ways of structuring transitions. First, we highlighted the way transitions are structured by chronological age, argued to be a historically recent practice that originated in Western societies within the context of the institutionalisation of education at the beginning of the 20th century. Despite the global importance of age as a transition marker, especially within formal educational settings, it is important to bear in mind that there also exist other logics which structure transitions. Gender has a powerful influence on all aspects of childhood, although how much and in what specific ways it shapes transitions varies between families, communities and societies.

Social transitions, or rites of passage, mark movements from one social status to another, e.g., from child to adolescent or from pre-school to primary school pupil. Border crossing theories look at the borders children are crossing in their daily lives and ask how children integrate experiences in different everyday settings (e.g., school and home). Rites of passage theory draws attention to the importance of the so-called 'liminal period'. During this phase of the transition experience, children are uprooted from their previous environment (e.g., kindergarten) without yet having fully adapted to their new setting (e.g., primary school). It is during this phase of transitions that interventions may be most successful in influencing children's pathways.

Border crossing theories are based on the assumption that various borders exist between children's different life domains, and that breaking down the 'border' between the domain of home and school may benefit children's learning. Policy-makers and practitioners would be encouraged to find ways for caregivers to engage effectively in their children's education and for educators to better understand the way children's home environments shape their school experiences. This view highlights the need for greater understanding of the various barriers that prevent caregivers from engaging with their children's education and raises the question of the extent to which parents and communities may benefit from an increased sense of ownership of their children's care and educational institutions.

Chapter 3: Transitions within systems

Children's transitions are usually defined in terms of the immediate contexts and practices that shape their lives, notably in home, pre-school and school settings. Systemic approaches recognise that children's experiences of transition are embedded in wider social structures and processes. For example, early childhood is widely recognised as the period when the most intensive care is needed in order to ensure young children's well-being, health, learning and play. Within children's immediate environment, primary caregivers and peers have a pivotal role in guiding young children through early life transitions. Yet, when experiencing stress through modern lifestyles, economic hardship, conflict and other adversities, primary caregivers may not always be in the capacity to provide sufficient care and support for children.

This section explores ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986) and life course theory (Elder, 1994) as two conceptual models that inform empirical research and practice on children's transitions within a wider social context. These theoretical tools are helpful for assessing lifetime implications of experiences of risk and poverty in early childhood and monitoring impacts of institutional structures and relationships. Because of their focus on wider structural influences, these theories complement socio-cultural approaches, which are more concerned with children's immediate environment.

Ecological theory

Ecological frameworks offer a comprehensive approach for the study of transitions. Like socio-cultural perspectives, ecological approaches recognise children's immediate experiences in context, but also capture patterns of interaction between individuals, groups and institutions as they unfold over time (Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta, 2000: 500). They have the benefit of capturing how, for instance, transitions on the macro level (e.g., economic depression) impact on children via parental unemployment (exosystem) with consequences for the household microsystems with which children directly engage.

Psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner elaborated the ecological approach to human development in the 1970s. It is informed by systems theory, which underscores the interactions of (ever-changing) individuals within the context of their (ever-changing) environments. In his research, Bronfenbrenner was mostly concerned with an individual's position in wider ecological systems and how, for example, external influences affect the capacity of caregivers to foster the healthy development of children. He perceived four aspects of the ecology in which children grow up: microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems. 'Microsystems' relate to children's experiences and interactions with peers, teachers and caregivers in everyday

settings, at home, school, child care centre, etc. 'Mesosystems' are the relation between these different microsystems, e.g., the complementary and/or conflicting practices and belief systems at home and at school and the informal/formal communications between parents and teachers. Bronfenbrenner argued that any setting involves direct or indirect relations with other settings. Therefore, analysis of mesosystems focus on questions related to the shifts of settings and roles individuals experience during ecological transitions – for instance, whether children enter a new setting alone or with familiar peers or what kind of information children and their parents receive before embarking on major transitions. 'Exosystems' are areas of social life in which children do not themselves participate, but which nonetheless impact on their lives and well-being through interconnections with microsystems. For example, parental work settings and practices are usually physically separate from the settings children inhabit. Their parents make daily 'border-crossings' from home to work, just as their children make 'border crossings' from home to pre-school or school. But these exosystems impact on children, insofar as, for example, physical proximity, hours and conditions of work, etc., constrain parents' availability to care for children at home, accompany them to pre-school, and so on. Note that parental work patterns may be defined as exosystems in industrialised countries, but this may not be the case for agricultural communities, where boundaries between children and their caregivers' work settings and activities may be less sharply defined. Religious settings may also form an exosystem until children go through a rite of passage that grants them full participation to sacred spaces and rituals (e.g., Ridgely Bales, 2005).

The influence of exosystems on children should not be underestimated. Within systems theory there exists concern for the organisation of caregivers' work as well as community organisations and the capacity of public policy to shape these systems in ways that are supportive for child development. On Bronfenbrenner's original formulation, 'macrosystems' relate to the dominant beliefs and the organisation of pervasive institutions that shape the cultural settings in which children develop. Macrosystems link with exosystems, as caregivers' economic activities are underpinned by policies, laws and regulations.

Another feature of ecological theory concerns children's role in their development. In this view, children develop through everyday interactions with their caregivers and with other children, symbols and objects in a given context. As participants both within microsystems and at the exosystem intersections between microsystems, (i.e., transitions and border crossings), children are not only influenced by their environment but actively change it (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Although initially neglected, Bronfenbrenner's later work pays increasing attention to the temporal dimension of transition experiences. Thus, when systems-theory-inspired researchers speak of 'chronosystems', they acknowledge the historical context of their studies and examine how historical changes impact upon transitions in individual and community lives.

Ecological theory has been very influential as an underpinning framework for the study of early childhood, with important implications for the study of transitions. But it also has limitations, especially when systems are oversimplified and reified. For example, while the identification of multiple interacting systems is conceptually elegant, there is a risk of objectifying boundaries and assuming internal sub-system coherence, (especially when represented by the classic 'onion' diagram). Each actor's experiences of their ecology will be different. Children's perspectives may be very different from adults', which may be overlooked by an outside observer's attempt to model a singular 'ecology of child development' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Their experiences of settings, relationships and activities may be more dispersed and changing than the concept of a microsystem implies, especially where family relationships are fractured, conflictual and even dysfunctional. These complexities are highlighted by studies of how household and family formation, breakdown and reconstitution impact on children's relationship building, loss and adjustment as well as their domestic arrangements and well-being (e.g., Hagan et al., 1996; Smart and Neale, 1999).

Another caution regarding ecological theory relates to the way the model typically positions the child at the centre of multiple nested systems. While centring on the singular child may be desirable from a social policy and child rights perspective, it does not reflect the multiple priorities of many of the systems in which children participate, nor does it recognise the competing priorities of adults with power over their lives. For example, while being 'child centred' is ostensibly the *raison d'être* for child-focused services, the child is but one of the priorities within family settings, and the child may be a marginal member of some community systems. The interactions between individual, social, economic, political and cultural processes is also at risk of being overlooked within Bronfenbrenner's original formulation, especially where individual and 'larger' contexts are viewed as separate entities organised in hierarchical fashion of organising 'larger contexts' (macrosystems) in relation to 'smaller' ones (Rogoff, 2003: 45–46). Identifying cultural context as part of macrosystems draws attention away from the central role of cultural beliefs, goals and practices in mediating children's experiences and activities at every level.

Despite these cautions, many researchers have found Bronfenbrenner's framework helpful to explore experiences in early childhood in general and transitions to kindergarten or primary school in particular (e.g., Bohan-Baker and Little, 2004; Johansson, 2007; Fabian and Dunlop, 2002 and 2007; Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta, 2000; Tudge et al., 2003; Tudge and Hogan, 2005). For example, Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) conceptualise the ecology of transitions to school with a particular focus on the development of relationships over time, underscoring the importance of context for understanding children's transition experiences. Longitudinal research with repeated assessments can contribute a lot to our understanding of how changes in the contexts of children's lives impacts on children's ability to make key life

changes. Furthermore, the complexity of the linkage and the mutual shaping of contexts would ideally require a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Nevertheless, more studies are needed on the link between local network-level interaction, policy and programme participation, and child development. Further research from this perspective could address why some children experience similar outcomes under different policy conditions, or different outcomes under the same policy conditions.

> "The nature of change processes in the many systems intervening between the macro and individual levels has been under explored as has the issue of how such processes mediate effects of policy on development" (Yoshikawa and Hsueh, 2001: 1888).

Yoshikawa and Hsueh insist that the role of the family should neither be under- nor overestimated. Family research using a variety of national and other datasets shows that variations in parenting style and home environments may explain as much as half of the effect that household poverty has on children. Understanding intra-household dynamics (for example how resources and roles are distributed among children in a given household) could reveal the decision-making processes that explain why some children make certain transitions, while others do not.

There are other factors between policy and household that impact on children's transitions (e.g., community influences and norms) and these are usually poorly examined. For example, there exists little research on how cultural differences may influence the reception of benefits (or respond to opportunities for intervention in the early years). Also relatively unexplored is the role of social networks within communities and how these affect whether or not families accept child-targeted welfare (Yoshikawa and Hsueh, 2001: 1890).

Transitions and life course theory

Life course theory is closely related to the ecological approach to human development. The model understands human development as a multi-level phenomenon, comprising structured pathways through social institutions and organisations to the social trajectories of individuals (Elder, 1994: 5). More than any other framework, this approach emphasises that human development cannot be detached from social history. On the one hand, historical conditions shape the way children grow up. On the other hand, history is produced through the agency of children and adults (Elder, 1994: 5–6; Ryder, 1965: 861).

Life course theory was built on evidence from some of the earliest longitudinal cohort studies in the USA. The theory locates individual trajectories in relation to massive social changes such as migration, economic depression, and armed conflict. Research in this area provides evidence that the meaning of social change and the capacity to cope with adversity strongly depends on age status (Elder, 1994: 10). In his study *Children of the Great Depression* (1974),

Elder analysed data from two longitudinal studies that had been conducted in California with two cohorts of children born respectively at the beginning and at the end of the 1920s. The availability of this data allowed the assessment of developmental outcomes throughout childhood, adolescence and adulthood, and provides robust evidence of the complex interactions between individual characteristics, household structures and the role of adversities.

As children of one sample were born eight years earlier than those of the second sample, Elder was able to compare the effects of economic depression on two cohorts of children: those who were adolescents when their families lost income versus those who were still young children at that time. The comparison showed very different results for these groups. Children whose caregivers became economically deprived when they were adolescents seem to have gained from the severe experience. Compared to non-deprived young people, loss of family income appeared to spur a sense of achievement, as well as greater satisfaction in later life amongst impoverished boys and girls. According to Elder, the loss of income forced families to mobilise human resources and provided mothers and teenagers with new roles and responsibilities which trained them in initiative, cooperation, and responsibility. Yet, these favourable outcomes were not shared by the younger cohort. Compared to their peers from non-deprived families, the cohort that experienced the depression as very young children subsequently had a lower school performance and showed less stable work histories as well as observable emotional and social difficulties until middle adulthood. There were also important gender differences. Negative outcomes were more strongly displayed among boys. Their greater vulnerability was very probably linked to their father's loss of livelihood, leading to demoralisation and low self-esteem, which transferred more to their sons than their daughters, who were more likely to identify strongly with their mother (Elder, 1974). In short, Elders's study draws attention to the impact of changing societies on developing lives. It is particularly sensitive to the impact of historical events (macrosystem changes in ecological theory) on early childhood, highlighting how these shape children's capacities to negotiate developmental transitions and the consequences for their future agency and life choices.

This research corroborates the evidence that environmental variables impact differently on children and encourages further research on the balance of risk and protective factors that contribute to children's relative vulnerability and resilience (e.g., Boyden, 2006; Boyden and Mann, 2005; Hart, 2004; Mann, 2004; Yaqub, 2002). Studies of extreme deprivation have been especially influential, notably in groups of children in institutional care and orphanages. These studies demonstrate that making an early transition to an enhanced environment can serve as a protective factor, with long-term outcomes (e.g., Rutter et al., 1998; Wolff and Fesseha, 1999). Studies on school transitions also examined how risk factors – accumulated over a long-term period – cause academic

disengagement and eventual school drop-outs (e.g., Alexander et al., 1997; Punch, 2003, Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo, 1992). Finally, there exists a wealth of research evidence that well-resourced ECCE programmes hold the potential of supporting young children and their caregivers in coping with adversities and improving their prospects of successful school transitions. Conversely, lack of professional and political commitment to mobilise ECCE action may amplify the risks to young children's well-being (Jolly, 2007: 8; Woodhead, 2006: 11).

Summary

Ecological and life course theories highlight how children's transition experiences are embedded in wider social systems. Ecological systems theory draws particular attention to the interconnections and mutual influences between children's and their caregivers' social worlds. These frameworks are valuable tools for conceptualising the potential of early childhood programmes and services to impact on children's life chances (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007).

Life course theory draws attention to the fact that children relate and respond differently to adversity. Not all children suffer from negative repercussions of harmful experiences. Depending on their social status, their age and their gender, some children may even show resilience in the face of adversity. Therefore, rather than relying on the assumption of children's 'inherent vulnerability', it is important to evaluate the impact of potential interventions in a more

Example: Young Lives

'Young Lives' is a 15-year four-country longitudinal study of childhood poverty that draws on ecological and life course themes, with transitions as a particular focus. Begun in 2000, 'Young Lives' is funded by the UK Department for International Development to follow the lives of 12,000 children growing up in the context of poverty in Ethiopia, Andhra Pradesh (India), Peru and Vietnam. It was devised to inform the Millennium Development Goals by increasing understanding of the causes, nature and consequences of child poverty in order to provide a strong evidence base for child-focused policy. The research combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to trace the life course trajectories of two cohorts of children (separated by an eight-year age gap) within the contexts of their households and communities. As subsequent rounds of data collection take place, studying two cohorts may enable analyses into the way life course position mediates experiences of poverty and long-term outcomes for well-being. Information is being collected every few years on each of the 12,000 children, their caregivers and households, and the communities in which they are growing up. This will provide insights into factors influencing change in three generations living in poverty, as some of the older cohort of children (now aged 12 or 13) have become parents themselves. A life course approach is necessary to understand the complexities of the inter-generational transfer of poverty and to explain why individuals move into and out of poverty (see www.younglives.org.uk).

nuanced way, with regard to scale, timing and focus (Walker et al., 2007). These frameworks also draw attention to structural hardships, as these may put a strain on caregivers' time, health and resources. They emphasise the pivotal role of programmes and interventions in complementing primary caregivers efforts to stimulate young children's development (UNCRC et al., 2006: 44–48).[6]

[6] *For example, article 18.3 recognises that in many parts of the world, caretakers are economically active in poorly paid conditions and encourages measures to ensure that children of working parents benefit from childcare services and facilities to which they are eligible (UNCRC et al. 2006: 44).*

Chapter 4: Children's participation in transitions

Children's participation in their transition experiences has been addressed in traditional academic studies in questions about their activity and agency, and more broadly their role in shaping their own childhoods (Woodhead, 2003). For example, Piagetian constructivist paradigms within developmental psychology take for granted that children actively engage with their physical and social environment, constructing cognitive models to make sense of their changing environment and gradually acquiring increasing sophistication in their intellectual, social and moral understanding. Studies of social development have emphasised children's role as social actors and meaning makers (Bruner and Haste, 1987), partners in social interaction, reciprocal exchanges and transactional patterns of mutual influence (reviewed by Schaffer, 1996). Meanwhile, sociological theories have emphasised the power of social structure to shape individual lives, while micro-analysis of social process has revealed the ways individuals contribute to the creation of social life. Reconciling structure and agency has been a major theme (Giddens, 1979) that continues to underpin studies into children's socialisation, with a surge of interest in exploring aspects of children's social competence (e.g., Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998) as well as in mapping the ways children construct their socialisation (Mayall, 1994). Reconstructing the young child's status in childhood theory (James et al., 1998; Woodhead, 1998) has been matched by reframing their role in research (Alderson and Morrow, 2004; Woodhead and Faulkner, 2008).

Recent analytic interest in children's agency has considerable implications for child rights-based research, policy and practice, including around early transitions. Stressing the pivotal role of children's participatory rights, General Comment 7 notes that: "Respect for the young child's agency – as a participant in family, community and society – is frequently overlooked, or rejected on the grounds of age and immaturity" (UNCRC et al., 2006: 40). This also implies recognition of the fact that children are active agents constantly involved in making sense of and participating in the ongoing affairs of their social surrounding (Woodhead, 2006: 28). This chapter first examines research into the role of peer cultures in children's transition experiences, followed by a summary of the Mosaic Approach, a methodological tool for studying children's participation in their own transitions.

Children's peer cultures

Within contemporary developmental psychology, socio-cultural theorists recognise that children's learning is guided not only by adult members of their community but also through collaborative learning with their peers (e.g., Mercer and Littleton, 2007: 38). In a similar vein, sociological research suggests that children creatively

appropriate information from the adult world and produce autonomous peer cultures (e.g., Corsaro, 1992: 168). Corsaro and Molinari (2005) report an ethnographic study of children's transition from pre-school to elementary school. Their research focuses on how children collectively prepare for their transition from pre-school to elementary school through 'priming events', a way of constructing initial bridges between different settings through events and routines (e.g., celebrations, singing of special songs, etc.) which are initiated and promoted by children, their peers, teachers, families and community members. Peer activity is given particular importance, as it is evidence of peer influence in appropriating culture and of children engaging in laying the foundations for their future.

Through their concept of 'interpretive reproduction', Corsaro and Molinari highlight children's collective agency in shaping their evolving membership in their culture, as well as the ways in which their agency is socially constrained. The 'interpretive reproduction' approach draws a parallel with socio-cultural theory when they acknowledge that changes (including life transitions) occur when individuals are involved in ongoing activities with their environment. Similar to Rogoff's idea of 'participatory appropriation', Corsaro and Molinari's 'priming events' are interactive and symbolic activities that enable children to actively contribute to experiences of change.[7]

However, their approach departs from socio-cultural theory in the explicit focus on the constraints that shape children's engagement with the world and by foregrounding ethnography as the key method for understanding the interaction between peer groups, children's caregivers, and their teachers. Corsaro and Molinari's approach also stands in contrast to ecological system theory, in that the singular 'child' is not placed at the centre of the model. Instead, the collective character of transition experiences is stressed as shared among peers at every stage: in their anticipation of transitions (e.g., through priming events), in the process of transition and in reflections on past transitions (Corsaro and Molinari, 2005: 20–22).

From a different study of school transitions, two brief examples of children talking about their experiences illustrate the point (Brooker, personal communication). The first is from a child in Bangladesh and the second is from Fiji:

Anticipation: "I heard that in the school where I'm going, the older kids hit the younger kids. If that happens I'll come back to this school. And if I have to go to another school I'll go to a good one. I won't go back to that one."

Reflection: "I did not really enjoy going into pre-school. This is because my parents had done a space in my home like a pre-school. I had a see-saw, a swing, a pile of sand, and a lot of toys that I can play with. My mother and father would tell

[7] *See also section on 'rites of passage'*

stories and read story books to me before going to bed."

Ethnographic research with young children corroborates the importance of peer cultures (Brooker, 2006; Pratt and George, 2005). For example, comparative research in a Korean private kindergarten and a UK reception class found that peer cultures influence considerably individual children's beliefs about the world. Peer cultures may transform opinions on gender roles and relationships acquired within the family. In this way, peers may have a dual role; on the one hand, they are a source of empowerment, and on the other, they are a source of risk – for example, through discriminatory behaviour that excludes certain children from the peer group. The study recommends proactive intervention in cases of discrimination, based on careful listening to the discourses of young children and their peers (Brooker, 2006: 125–126).

Another study explored how peer cultures and the gendered attitudes towards friendship of primary school students shaped their experiences around transfer to secondary school (Pratt and George, 2005). This study found that all children, but particularly boys, experience stress associated with school transfer, peer acceptance and teacher expectations. In the face of a new learning environment, the concern to belong and conform to a peer group was shown to be very intense and to exceed other concerns (e.g., for academic success). The study suggests that peers can be both a distraction as well as a source of support in shaping educational pathways (Pratt and George, 2005: 24).

Methodological tools for transitions research

In *Listening to Young Children: The Mosaic Approach,* Clark and Moss (2001: 41) insist that "listening must not wait until children are able to join in adult conversations." Premised on the assumption that children communicate in different ways, the Mosaic Approach was developed as a way to 'listen to' young children and to involve their views and experiences in reviewing 'early years' services. The main study was carried out with 3–4-year-olds over an 18-month period in a UK early childhood institution (incorporating a nursery and a homeless families' centre located on the same community campus), involving children, staff, and caregivers.

The Mosaic Approach is described by the authors as (Clark and Moss, 2001: 5):

- ***Multi-method*** – recognises the different 'voices' and skills of children;
- ***Participatory*** – considers children to be competent and experts on their own lives; respects children's views and also their silences;
- ***Reflexive*** – includes children and adults in a joint effort of interpretation; views listening as a process;
- ***Adaptive*** – can be applied in a variety of early childhood settings; methods will depend on the characteristics of the group, such as gender, cultural backgrounds, skills of staff or researchers, etc.;
- ***Focused on children's lived experiences*** – moves away from a view of children as consumers of services;

- ***Embedded into practice*** – can be used for evaluation purposes ('listening as consulting') and can also become part of daily practice ('ongoing conversation') in early years institutions.

There are two stages to the Mosaic Approach:

The first stage involves a process of documentation by children and adults through a variety of techniques, including participant observation and participatory research methods such as child-led tours, mapping, and role play. Using visual and other non-verbal methods may be particularly effective in working with children with limited language skills (including older refugee children, for example).

Stage 2 consists of piecing together information for dialogue, reflection and interpretation, with each perspective or unit of data providing one piece of the 'mosaic'. When practitioners and parents listen to children's perspectives, "it is in the interpretation of the material gathered that the possibility for greater understanding of young children's lives will emerge" (Clark and Moss, 2001: 55).

Clearly influenced by the Mosaic Approach, Dockett and Perry's (2005) Starting School Research Project emphasises multiple perspectives in researching children's transition to school. Indeed, socio-cultural research on young children's transition experiences points to the importance of involving parents in transitions processes. This strategy is particularly conducive to encourage parental involvement in children's transition to school, especially where home cultures differ markedly from those of school. Involving parents in research is also important in identifying the areas where children and adults may differ (or agree) on expectations regarding school transition, experience, and achievement.

Dockett and Perry produced data consisting of photographs with accompanying text, transcripts of conversations, drawings of school, videotapes of interactions; together these conveyed children's perspectives, experiences and expectations about school (Dockett and Perry, 2005: 517). They found that what matters to children in transitioning to school is often different from what matters to adults. Furthermore, they found that "there will be no one 'best' approach that suits all children or all contexts" (p. 519).

In transitions research, recognising this complexity involves considering the decisions that are made for children by adults and listening to what children have to say about starting school.

Summary

Research evidence for the pivotal role of children's peer cultures is programme-relevant. In many parts of the world, classroom sizes are large and children of different ages are often instructed together. Given the scarcity of teachers in these schools, many children in these classrooms are often left unattended. This may

Example: Tai Wisdom Association (TWA)

Research suggests that institutions of education, including early childhood education, have the possibility to be places of change. According to Peter Moss (2007), early childhood institution and programmes can indeed nurture participatory democratic practice. This implies an ecological consideration of democratic practices on many levels, such as families, ECCE institutions as well as the federal and local level of decision-making. During programme planning phases, involvement of young children and their caretakers ensures that children's best interests are at the starting point for services and programmes. It is important to learn in what kind of environment they feel at ease to start learning. For example, child libraries run by the TWA are designed in a way that reminds children and their caregivers of the architecture of homes. TWA found that children enjoy buildings that are surrounded by a corridor where they can read, chat or just lie down and sleep. Concerning the location, TWA also tries to establish its libraries at the centre of community life, easily accessible on foot by even young children. Finally, also the timing of libraries is adapted to children and their caretakers' schedules. Libraries are therefore closed during office and school hours, but open until late in the evening when children have free time (TWA, 2007a: 24).

lead to boredom, increased physical risk and a decrease in learning motivation among pupils. In such conditions, peers, who have the potential to teach each other through participatory instruction, are an underused resource.

Participatory research and programmes with children during the early years are also relevant to democracy. Through the adaptation of democratic principles, nursery schools can prepare children from the earliest years on to become critically minded and tolerant citizens: "Honouring young children's rights to express their views creates more effective policy and it fosters stronger, more cohesive and inclusive communities. In these ways it contributes to a healthy democracy which recognises that children's rights are the human rights of any citizen." (MacNaughton et al., 2007: 9)

Conclusion

This review has offered an overview of key theoretical approaches that may aid in the understanding of early childhood transitions. We have argued that children experience a range of personal, social and cultural thresholds that may or may not harmonise with their transition to school. Depending on their socio-cultural environment, role and status, children are faced with different decisions and responsibilities at various moments of their lives. Children's success or failure in passing through formal educational transitions cannot be assessed without regard to local education practices and socio-cultural context. In order to harmonise ECCE programmes with local education practices, it is important to assess local child-rearing practices, how these are underpinned by cultural beliefs, and to obtain knowledge of culturally recognised transitions, i.e. rites of passage.

The review stressed that evaluations of 'good' outcomes of development are always defined socially and differ according to a community's culture, which includes its economic surpluses, its system of subsistence and tools of survival, and its political, economic, and religious systems. It is therefore important that researchers and practitioners avoid imposing an ideal endpoint of development that reflects their own values as opposed to local understandings. On a more positive note, culturally sensitive interventions may have the potential to change repertoires of practice by enhancing children's and parents' opportunities to access services and participate in meaningful activities.

Furthermore, this review revealed the tendency for conceptualisations and research traditions to be linked to different disciplinary perspectives, with the fields of education and psychology dominating the ways in which transitions research has been framed, especially as it relates to institutional transitions, notably schooling. Anthropological and sociological perspectives can enrich transitions research through the concern with understanding a much broader canvas, encompassing personal, social and cultural transitions in wide-ranging contexts. Multi-disciplinary collaboration in transitions research and practice may foster holistic approaches that contextualise children's experiences of change within the broader, inter-related contexts of their families, institutions, and communities. Especially with global initiatives like Education for All, grounded understandings of cultural practices and livelihoods may inform programming in relation to pre-school and primary education.

The review underscores the value of using a variety of conceptual and methodological tools to achieve a holistic understanding of childhood transitions. Methodologies incorporating ethnography and multiple methods were highlighted as potentially useful in adapting to the different ways in which children communicate

and to their diverse social worlds. Longitudinal research in particular may be capable of linking early transitions with later outcomes over the life course.

The central message of the review is that greater transparency is needed to make more explicit the underlying assumptions regarding childhood and child development that inform policy, programming and research. There is "the perennial temptation to inflate the significance of a particular theory or evidence where it serves advocacy, which is ostensibly on behalf of young children's rights and well-being, but frequently is also linked to particular visions for early childhood, specific stakeholders or sets of political priorities" (Woodhead, 2006: 6).

Research and practice around early childhood transitions centres largely on institutional transitions, particularly in relation to formal care and education. Political, economic, cultural, and psycho-social factors interact in shaping children's ability to access quality basic services. Transitions research has the potential to unravel these factors – at micro, meso, and macro levels – that explain why some children have opportunities for development while others do not, as well as the directions of development and their impact on life course trajectories. Few actions on behalf of children are apolitical or free from theory, and this review hopes to highlight the need to make more explicit the underlying concepts and visions of childhood and child development that drive current policy and programming on early childhood transitions.

Glossary: Some major concepts relevant to transitions research

Border crossing: In contrast to **rites of passage**, border crossing theory focuses on transitions that occur on an everyday basis. It presumes 'domains of life' (e.g., home, workplace, school), separated by 'frontiers', or borders, which individuals must successfully cross on a daily basis in order to perform their 'domain' roles (Campbell Clark, 2000).

Cultural thresholds: Key concept for **rites of passage** indicating the sequential passage from one state to another (i.e., from preliminal to liminal to postliminal).

Developmental niche: A child-within-family focused concept inspired by cross-cultural research. The developmental niche comprises: 1) caregivers' belief systems (ethnotheories) regarding child-rearing, 2) the material conditions and in particular spatial arrangements of child-rearing, and 3) the actual practices of child-rearing (Super and Harkness, 1986).

Domain: In **border crossing** theory, 'domain' refers to a sphere of life separated from other domains on the basis of distinct social roles, responsibilities, and location (e.g., kindergarten and parents' workplace) (Campbell Clark, 2000).

Ecological theory: Informed by systems theory, provides a framework for understanding the multiple contexts inhabited by the young child (microsystems), the significance of **border crossings** between microsystems, the linkages between contexts (mesosystems), and the wider influence of exosystems and macrosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Guided participation: Describes the process whereby caregivers, teachers and peers assist children in their development. While inspired by Vygotskian theory, Rogoff extends the concept of **zone of proximal development** to stress the inter-relatedness of adults' and children's roles, and applies the concept to cover teaching processes outside formal educational settings (e.g., weaving, cooking). Vygotsky's interest was primarily in the role of literacy skills in learning, while Rogoff is more broadly interested in culturally valued activities that may or may not include literacy skills. Guided participation is universal but the forms of its expression vary according to cultural contexts, settings and social actors (Rogoff, 1990).

Interpretive reproduction: Conceptually similar to Rogoff's **'repertoires of practice',** though with greater focus on collective processes (peer cultures), and less focus on individual experience. Interpretive reproduction captures two mutually constitutive processes: 1) children (and human

beings in general) interpret the social world for themselves (stressing their agency) and 2) by interpreting it and acting within the social world they reproduce a social order (stressing structure) (Corsaro, 1992).

Life course theory: Closely related to the **ecological** approach to human development. Human development is understood as a multi-level phenomenon, comprising structured pathways through social institutions and organisations to shape the social trajectories of individuals (Elder, 1994). More than any other framework, this approach emphasises that human development cannot be detached from social history and also captures the cultural-historical context of risk and protective factors that shape children's **vulnerability/resilience.**

Liminality: The second of three phases of **rites of passage,** also referred to as a state of being "betwixt and between" to highlight the suspended status of individuals who leave one role but have not yet fully incorporated the new role (van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1995). Programme interventions targeted at this phase may be particularly effective as children are on the cusp of assuming new roles and responsibilities and possibly shifting their trajectories.

Mosaic approach: A methodology developed for participatory research and consultation with young children (Clark and Moss, 2001). It promotes a combination of verbal and non-verbal techniques with children and adults to elicit children's views on their care settings and lives. Because of its participatory nature, it supports the principles of outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989. It is especially relevant to research and consultations with young children about their transition experiences.

Peer cultures: The culture shared by children and their groups of friends or classmates. The role of children's interaction in their collective appropriation of culture is stressed, and peer culture may play a crucial role in moderating the stresses associated with transitions (Corsaro and Molinari, 2005).

Priming events: Occasions such as celebration, activities, speeches and information-sharing opportunities that anticipate imminent transitions in children's lives and are intended to prepare children for change. Both children and adults engage in these events (Corsaro and Molinari, 2005).

Pupil careers: The process by which children manage their role and identity as pupils within the institutional structures and practices of school systems. It is relevant from pre-school through to school, leaving a framework for studying variations in transition experiences and outcomes on bases other than grades and other standard assessments of success (Woods, 1990; Lam and Pollard, 2006).

Repertoires of practice: Deep-seated dispositions for activity and behaviour in a given setting, based on individuals' prior experiences in similar settings, and structured by their opportunities to access and participate in these settings. They are applicable to the understanding of levels of continuity or discontinuity between settings during periods of transition (Rogoff, 2003).

Reversibility/irreversibility: Terms that refer to the impacts of specific (usually adverse) experiences on later outcomes. They are of particular interest for the timing and targeting of programme intervention. Reversible outcomes can be 'corrected' through timely and appropriate interventions, while irreversible outcomes have a greater influence on shaping life pathways, including key transitions.

Rites of passage: The sequential process (i.e. preliminal, liminal and postliminal phases) marking an individual's change of status, usually involving a public ceremony distinguished from everyday life through specific symbols and rituals (van Gennep, 1960).

Scaffolding: A Vygotskian concept referring to the structured assistance children receive from their peers and adults (e.g., parents and teachers) in reaching new skills and developmental goals. Scaffolding is progressively withdrawn as children's competence increases (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976). It describes processes underpinning the **zone of proximal development**. It is also linked to the concept of **guided participation**, but the latter places greater emphasis on the 'learner's' as well as the 'teacher's' contribution toward engaging in tools and signs to transmit knowledge and practical routines. Scaffolding is likely most important at times of transition, when children are faced with new routines and challenges.

Vulnerability/resilience: A theoretical framework to account for variations in children's ability to cope with adversities. Outcomes for children are the product of a combination of risk versus protective factors, which in each case includes both personal qualities as well as environmental factors. Quality early childhood programmes can be an important protective factor in reducing children's vulnerability (Rutter et al., 1998, Luthar, 2003).

Zone of proximal development: According to Vygotsky (1978), the transition between learning and development occurs in the 'zone of proximal development', which is the distance between the most difficult task a child can perform without help and the most difficult task s/he can do with support. It is therefore through the instruction (see **scaffolding** and **guided participation**) from teachers, adults and more skilled peers that children develop and learn to negotiate successful transitions.

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About the Bernard van Leer Foundation
The Bernard van Leer Foundation funds and shares knowledge about work in early childhood development. The foundation was established in 1949 and is based in the Netherlands. Our income is derived from the bequest of Bernard van Leer, a Dutch industrialist and philanthropist, who lived from 1883 to 1958.

Our mission is to improve opportunities for children up to age 8 who are growing up in socially and economically difficult circumstances. We see this both as a valuable end in itself and as a long-term means to promoting more cohesive, considerate and creative societies with equality of opportunity and rights for all.

We work primarily by supporting programmes implemented by partners in the field. These include public, private and community-based organisations. Our strategy of working through partnerships is intended to build local capacity, promote innovation and flexibility, and help to ensure that the work we fund is culturally and contextually appropriate.

We currently support about 140 major projects. We focus our grantmaking on 21 countries in which we have built up experience over the years. These include both developing and industrialised countries and represent a geographical range that encompasses Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas.

We work in three issue areas:

- Through "Strengthening the Care Environment" we aim to build the capacity of vulnerable parents, families and communities to care for their children.
- Through "Successful Transitions: The Continuum from Home to School" we aim to help young children make the transition from their home environment to daycare, preschool and school.
- Through "Social Inclusion and Respect for Diversity" we aim to promote equal opportunities and skills that will help children to live in diverse societies.

Also central to our work is the ongoing effort to document and analyse the projects we support, with the twin aims of learning lessons for our future grantmaking activities and generating knowledge we can share. Through our evidence-based advocacy and publications, we aim to inform and influence policy and practice both in the countries where we operate and beyond.

Information on the series
Working Papers in Early Childhood Development is a 'work in progress' series that presents relevant findings and reflection on issues relating to early childhood care and development. The series acts primarily as a forum for the exchange of ideas, often arising out of field work, evaluations and training experiences. As 'think pieces' we hope these papers will evoke responses and lead to further information sharing from among the readership.

The findings, interpretations, conclusions and opinions expressed in this series are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

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