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EDITORIAL

TRANSITIONS IN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

One of the features of the current world is that all things are in constant movement and subject to rapid change. All occurrences consist of fragments and individual episodes. They are short-lived and pliable. In this context, education and students' journeys through the educational system and life at school are inextricably linked with expected and unexpected transition points, tasks, and decisions. Some are developmental, resulting from the ageing process and marked by considerable individual physical, intellectual, and emotional change. Others are systemic, systematically built into the structure of the national school system (Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm, & Splittgerber, 2000) and characterized by a change in social relations, positions, and academic expectations and goals.

While a number of students manage to eventually deal with educational transitions, for some groups of individuals such transitions can negatively influence their psychological or career development. The research shows that transitions into new, undesirable contexts can result in emotional, social, or other problems, e.g., social isolation (Haynie & South, 2005) or difficulties with establishing new relationships with peers. School transitions can also negatively affect students' motivation to study, educational aspirations, academic performance (Mehan & Reynolds, 2004), and school attendance and can even result in school alienation, which can cause them to drop out (Gasper, DeLuca, & Estacion, 2012; Akos & Galassi, 2004), lower their educational attainment (Haveman, Wolfe, & Spaulding, 1991), and create prospective unemployment. However, transitions allow the creation of new experiences and promotion of a developmental step (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The importance of the topic can be confirmed by the number of international authorial teams who reacted to *Studia paedagogica's* call for papers for its monothematic issue *Transitions in Educational Contexts*. The editorial office received 19 papers, out of which 8 were accepted for the review process. Five

papers which successfully emerged from the review process are included in the Studies section of the current issue and one paper was chosen for the Emerging Researchers section. This issue shows new insights into research on educational transitions in various nations.

The first three studies have one denominator in common: students undergoing vocational education. According to Chantal Kamm and Anja Gebhardt, most young people in Switzerland choose vocational education once they have completed compulsory education. Therefore, their transition into vocational education is a significant point in their career trajectory since it influences their future professional success as well as their level of personal contentment and the nature of their individual development. Since young people are aware of this situation, they may experience pressure, which can be increased by the fact that they face situations which they find difficult to navigate, leading to feelings of helplessness. Kamm and Gebhardt's study "Risk Patterns and Bounded Agency in Vocational Orientation" therefore examines the process of vocational orientation among different groups of young people. Their study lists the patterns of risk which can be identified and characterized within the vocational orientation process, specifies how the identified and characterized risk patterns differ in relation to the perceived support provided by various support services, and shows how representatives of different risk patterns describe their individual vocational orientation processes and how apparent the aspects of (bounded) agency within this context are. The authors managed to identify three groups of students which experience different ranges of risk and also pointed out some possible ways the vocational orientation of such students can be supported.

Svenja Ohlemann and Katja Driesler-Lange examine the career competence of German vocational students in their paper "A Latent Profile Analysis of Career Competence in German Vocational Schools." While these students have already surpassed the difficult career decisions inherent in choosing their vocational training program, the authors noted that approximately a quarter of such students leave the dual training system and another quarter change their training program during their vocational education. It remains to be established how rational their career decisions were in the first place and whether such students are prepared for the challenges that their careers will bring (which is especially the case for their transition to work or further education). These concerns led Ohlemann and Driesler-Lange to research the career competences of German vocational school students because of the vital importance that competences have in making informed career choices. The authors then identified and described the profiles of student groups based on their career competences and specifics. While defining career competences, Ohlemann and Driesler-Lange based their research on the concept of career maturity, which was established by D. Super. They operationalize career

competences as having 12 facets: self-knowledge, occupational knowledge, knowledge of prerequisites, planning and deciding, career concern, career control, career curiosity, career confidence, exploration, self-regulation, problem solving, and stress management. The results of their study describe four different career competence profiles.

The next paper, authored by Petr Hlad'o, Bohumíra Lazarová, and Lenka Hloušková and entitled "Career Adaptability of Vocational Education and Training Graduates in the Period of Prospective School-to-Work Transition," also focuses on competences which enable individuals undergoing vocational education to successfully manage future transition tasks, such as changing and achieving career goals. The authors base their research on career construction theory and study its central category: career adaptability, which represents an individual's competence to deal with developmental tasks in the professional or career realm as compared to other individuals who face identical tasks at the same stage in their lives (Álvarez González, 2008). According to Savickas (2013), adaptive individuals start to cope with new career tasks or challenges by becoming concerned about their professional future and taking control of the required preparation for their professional future. Furthermore, they show curiosity in weighing their options and the possible future scenarios available to them and strengthen the confidence necessary for charting their professional future and fulfilling necessary career aspirations and plans. The results of the study identify those demographic and school-related variables which enable prediction of the career adaptability of vocational education and training graduates and which should therefore be paid increased attention in (career) education.

The next two studies leave the field of upper-secondary vocational education. In their paper "Teachers' Images of the Ideal Student as a Marker for School Culture and Its Role in School Alienation During the Transition from Primary to Secondary Education in Luxembourg," Alyssa Lauren Greco, Tina Hascher, and Andreas Hadjar claim that students need to adapt to a new set of conditions during their transition from primary to secondary education. The paper shows that one of the explanations as to why such students can experience a negative change in their approach to schools may stem from the diffuse sets of expectations that schools have towards their students. That can result in school alienation. This study therefore examines the differences in school culture at the primary and secondary levels and scrutinizes the relationship between the school transition process and school alienation. More specifically, the study examines how the expectations of teachers regarding student approaches and behaviour influence school alienation during the transition period. By doing so, the study identifies various risk and protective factors noticeable in the spread of school alienation in the context of specific school cultures.

A significant group of students entering tertiary education comprise non-traditional students. As Petr Novotný, Karla Brücknerová, Libor Juhaňák, and Katarína Rozvadská make clear in their study “Driven To Be a Non-Traditional Student: Measurement of the Academic Motivation Scale with Adult Learners After Their Transition to University,” such students can also include adults who left formal education for some time, gained significant life and work experience, and have returned to complete their tertiary education. The authors examine the academic motivation of these distinct students. The results of regression analysis show that intrinsic motivation is dominant among non-traditional students and that such motivation is accompanied by joy arising from learning, discovery, attempts to understand the unknown, and reaching goals or the stimulating feeling of being active. This is a significant finding which can be used by academics who work with non-traditional students to make their education more effective and increase their academic achievement (and also prevent them from dropping out).

An analytic study written by Anne-Mette Bjøru, “Upper Secondary School in Norway: Discourses About Dropout in White Papers,” is published in the Emerging Researchers section. Its author studies the various ways the dropout phenomenon has been defined during the past two decades in the context of Norwegian political documents.

The monothematic issue *Transitions in Educational Contexts* includes a number of interesting papers with insights valuable not only for further research, but also for their use in educational and counselling interventions. Therefore, we wish our readers inspiring reading.

Markus P. Neuenschwander and Petr Hlad'o
Editors

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