

International Perspectives on  
Early Childhood Education and Development 37

Angel Urbina-García · Bob Perry ·  
Sue Dockett · Divya Jindal-Snape ·  
Benilde García-Cabrero *Editors*

# Transitions to School: Perspectives and Experiences from Latin America

Research, Policy, and Practice

 Springer

# International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Development

Volume 37

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Editors

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*To Zyanya García – because you arrived in my life in the right moment at the right time to teach me how wonderful is to have you by my side, to see you grow, to educate you, raise you and guide you. Te Amo...*

*To Xiomani Urbina – because without you I would not be here. You started all this journey, and you keep being my motivation. You are my fan No. 1...and I am yours. Te Adoro...*

*Thank you both for being in my life...*

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## About the Editors

**Angel Urbina-García** is an international educational psychologist and an expert in child development with more than 15 years of experience in academia having worked in Asia, Europe, and America in the field of psychology and education working with students from more than 50 countries. He has held leadership positions in world-class universities and is an international researcher with significant experience in conducting research across continents using a mixed methodology and following a psycho-educational approach. Angel has led important international research projects with research grants from the prestigious British Academy, Leverhulme Trust, British Council, and the UK's Global Challenges Research Fund. He pioneered the research on preschool to school transition in Latin American contexts, and he has now created an important international network of researchers from South East Asia (e.g., Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia, and New Zealand), North America (e.g., Mexico and United States), and Latin America (e.g., Chile, Honduras, Brazil, Cuba, Argentina, Ecuador, and Colombia) to conduct cross-cultural cutting-edge research. His research findings have been disseminated widely at international world-class conferences and have been published in international peer-reviewed journals. Angel sits on the editorial board of the *International Journal of Educational and Life Transitions* and is a reviewer for several international world-leading peer-reviewed journals. He also works closely with the Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean: OREALC/UNESCO Santiago de Chile.

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**Sue Dockett** is Emeritus Professor of Early Childhood Education and director of Peridot Education Pty Ltd., having recently retired from Charles Sturt University, Albury, Australia. Over more than 30 years, she has been actively involved in early childhood education as a teacher, academic, and researcher. Much of Sue's current research agenda is focused on educational transitions, in particular transitions to school and the expectations, experiences, and perceptions of all involved. This research has been published widely, and has had substantial impact on policy, practice, and research. Complementing her research around educational transitions is research that incorporates children's perspectives, engages with families in diverse contexts, reflects upon the practices of educators, and explores the importance of working with communities.

**Divya Jindal-Snape** is chair of education, inclusion, and life transitions in the School of Education and Social Work. She obtained her undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications in India. She taught in an all-through school and lectured in education for a few years before moving to Japan to do a PhD at the University of Tsukuba. After living in Japan for nearly 5.5 years, enjoying research and teaching, she moved to Dundee. Divya is now director of the Transformative Change: Educational and Life Transitions (TCELT) Research Centre at Dundee University, and her research interests lie in the field of inclusion, and educational and life transitions. A significant proportion of her work has been with children and young people with additional support needs, especially children and young people with visual impairment, autism, learning difficulties, emotional and behavioral needs, and complex life limiting conditions. Her research has led to creation of educational resources to enhance inclusion and facilitate transitions through drama (inspired by Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed), stories, games, and other creative art forms.

**Benilde García-Cabrero** is Professor of Educational Psychology in the Faculty of Psychology at UNAM. She holds an MA in educational psychology from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and a PhD from UNAM and McGill University in Canada. She participated as a member of a team of consultants, both for the National Institute of Educational Evaluation (INEE) and the "Construye T" Program, where she has designed, adapted, and validated instruments to measure socioemotional skills for teachers and elementary, secondary, and high school students. She has worked as a government advisor for the Mexican Ministry of Education and as a consultant and coordinator of a number of international projects for various organizations and institutions such as UNICEF, UNESCO, World Bank, OECD, and CONAFE. Her current research interests are related to

teaching and learning in basic education (K-12), civic and citizenship education, and the affective dimensions of teaching and its relationship to students' socioemotional skills, situational interest, and academic engagement. She has published extensively in the form of scientific articles, national reports, international reports, and books, and is a member of a range of professional national and international bodies. She is currently a member of the editorial board of *the International Journal of Educational and Life Transitions* and of the scientific committee of *Revista Internacional de Educación Emocional y Bienestar* (International Journal of Emotional and Wellbeing Education, RIEEB).

# Chapter 1

## Transition to School in Latin American Countries: Introducing some Perspectives and Experiences



Angel Urbina-García , Divya Jindal-Snape , Bob Perry ,  
Sue Dockett , and Benilde García-Cabrero 

**Abstract** In this chapter, we introduce a book on the transition to school in Latin American countries. This book showcases some of the quality work that researchers from Brazil, Chile, Cuba, and Mexico have done in this field, reflecting how the transition to primary school is experienced and how Latin American educational policies and cultural practices shape such an important process for stakeholders. The book offers the English-speaking world first-hand access to some Latin American transitions research, practices, and policies. The chapters in the book are also framed by the COVID-19 pandemic which placed the world in a global health emergency. The authors of the chapters themselves faced a number of challenges as a result of the pandemic when writing this material. It is our hope that this book will trigger future international collaborations between researchers, policy makers, and practitioners interested in transitions which could help produce a wealth of empirical evidence to inform educational policies and transitions practices across the world. This chapter introduces the reader to all the chapters in the book.

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## **Rationale for This Book**

The growing body of research on transition to school has led scholars to cover many aspects such as educational and transition policies; transition practices and tools to support the transition; perspectives and lived experiences of children and teachers, practitioners and assistants as well as parents; and teacher-child relationships. However, these studies are predominantly from Europe, USA, Hong Kong, and Australia (Dunlop, 2018). This trend might suggest that research regarding transitions to school has been undertaken mainly in these developed countries. However, this is likely due to research in other countries being written in the authors' mother tongue rather than in English; research undertaken in Latin American countries being a case in point. To date, there has been limited awareness and understanding of Latin American transitions research, policies, and practices amongst the non-Spanish/Portuguese speaking readers. To redress this balance, Latin American authors in this book have presented their work in English, with the aim of creating opportunities for cross-national learning, reflection and collaborations.

This book comprises ten chapters. This chapter (Chap. 1) introduces the book and provides a brief overview to set the context for the other chapters, such as the rationale for the book, conceptualisation of transitions, educational systems, and policies of the four Latin American countries included in the book (Chile, Mexico, Brazil, and Cuba) and the emerging context of COVID-19. Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 present key information about transitions to schools in four Latin American countries, namely Chile (Chaps. 2 and 3), Mexico (Chap. 4), Cuba (Chap. 5) and Brazil (Chaps. 6, 7, and 8). Chapter 9, also from Brazil, differs from the other chapters by taking a particular focus on one independent system and the challenges presented by national policies for its philosophy and practice. It provides an in-depth example of the perhaps unforeseen challenges that can occur when government policies and early childhood education approaches clash. Chapter 10 concludes the book by synthesising the themes and directions presented in the previous chapters.

## **Brief Overview of COVID-19 and Related Challenges in Latin America**

This section introduces some aspects of COVID-19 and its impact; however, these will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter (Chap. 10). On March 20th 2020, the World Health Organisation declared the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been one of the most difficult challenges faced by global contemporary societies in different areas of life. The education sector is not an exception. Formal schooling was massively disrupted across the world due to the measures taken by governments to tackle the spread of the SARS-CoV-2, which is the virus responsible for COVID-19 (Urbina-Garcia, 2021). The pandemic led global governments to close

schools and promote the use of remote learning instead; however, these measures posed many challenges. Children from low-income families and rural areas were reported to have less access to electronic devices and internet (World Bank, 2021) exacerbating the existing inequities due to this digital divide. School closures meant that children could not physically attend the premises of their schools, affecting over 170 million pupils across the Latin American and Caribbean region (World Bank, 2021). This also led to highlighting structural inequalities in different societies across the world, and magnifying the social inequality that prevails in Latin America and the Caribbean region (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 2021; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 2021). For example, only 43% of primary schools in the region, have access to internet for pedagogical purposes.

Specifically, the COVID-19 pandemic affected children's personal lives and schooling in very specific ways in Chile, Brazil, Cuba, and Mexico. For example, in **Chile**, all schools and preschools were closed for almost the entire 2020 academic year and in 2021 only few have re-opened, as localities enter and exit quarantines. In **Mexico**, many children could not access distance education due to different reasons: internet access gaps and lack of adequate technological devices; absence of safe spaces in their homes, especially in the case of girls who must, on many occasions, assume care roles or are victims of violence and sexual abuse; and existence of overcrowding, food insecurity, and poor hygiene conditions that hinder the continuity of learning. In **Brazil**, most schools were closed during the pandemic but the Leeman Foundation, with funding from the LEGO Foundation, developed an initiative called *Educação em Rede* (Online Education). This initiative for teacher education, has reached 500,000 teachers across different regions of Brazil aimed to upskill and train teachers in the use of digital devices and platforms to deliver remote learning (World Bank, 2021). In **Cuba**, schools were closed in March 2020 and re-opened in September 2020; however, they were again closed in early 2021. Televised programs were created to support children aged 0–5; however, there were children with limited access to these.

It is important to acknowledge that the chapter authors for this book were similarly experiencing professional and personal challenges during the writing of their chapters. We acknowledge their commitment to children's transitions to schools in their countries which made this book possible.

## Importance of Transitions to School and Its Conceptualisation

The main purpose of early childhood education is to support a holistic social, emotional, physical, and educational development of a child which also sets the foundations for a love of learning, good health, wellbeing, and later personal development and life-long learning. Hence, offering a high-quality early childhood education is of utmost importance as it allows children to develop a range of social, motor, cognitive, and emotional skills which will form the basis of their personal development.



To this end, global governments ensure that early childhood education (UNESCO's International Standard Classification of Education; ISCED 0) is well-aligned with the demands and expectations related to transition to formal schooling which usually starts with primary school (ISCED 1) across the globe. Such alignment should aim to provide continuity between preschool and formal school provision as this could potentially impact children's personal, emotional, social, and academic development.

Therefore, transition to primary school has been internationally recognised as one of the most important, not only educational but also life transitions for young children. Some like, Mascareño et al. (2014), argue that the transition to primary school is a challenging process whereby children enter a new world of higher expectations where academic demands represent one of their main challenges comprising a more-structured learning environment, more teacher-directed activity, and academic assessments. Globally, this period of change has led governments to make efforts to facilitate this transition with a view to promoting children's wellbeing and optimum development given that some "research has found that some of the positive effects of participation in ECEC can fade in primary school when transitions between ECEC and school are ill-prepared" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2017, p. 41). The following chapters provide an understanding of the perspectives from four different countries (and at times multiple within the same country) of how governments have prioritised transition to primary school. This transition is regarded as a key period for children as they experience a number of significant changes including, but not limited to new environment, relationships, identities, roles, expectations, routines, and rules (Hirst et al., 2011; Perry et al., 2014).

Further, it is important to understand how different stakeholders have conceptualised transitions across the world. International organizations such as UNICEF (2012, p. 8) defines this transition as "children moving into and adjusting to new learning environments, families learning to work within a sociocultural system (i.e., education) and schools making provisions for admitting new children into the system". Fabian and Dunlop (2007, p. 3) define it as "...the process of change of environment and set of relationships that children make from one setting or phase of education to another over time". Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (1999) define it as a process of significant change from one environment to another quite different environment in which children will need knowledge, abilities, and skills to adapt to their new setting. Therefore, based on the literature published in English, which is primarily Western, it seems that a key element of this transition is a response to a *change or movement*. Bohan-Baker and Little (2002) define this as an *ongoing process* rather than an *isolated one-off event* in children's lives where members of the community (i.e., parents, teachers, policymakers) should be involved. Similarly, Jindal-Snape (2018) highlights the role of all stakeholders and defines "transition as an ongoing process of psychological, social and educational *adaptation* over time, due to changes in context, interpersonal relationships and identity, which can be both exciting and worrying, and requires ongoing support." (p. 283).