

# The transition from primary to secondary education

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## **Valorisation Addendum**

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### **The innovative aspect of the thesis**

It is not self-evident that science and social practice are aware of each other's findings and recommendations. In my thesis: *'The transition from primary to secondary education: A study of the voices of children and teachers in the Netherlands'* I bridge the gap in the exchange of knowledge between science and the pedagogical practice to stimulate dissemination from within schools by involving children and teachers directly in the research. The approach to start from the role of the child and to analyze the interaction with the other stakeholders makes it possible to find ways to improve the transition process from primary to secondary education.

That the educational practice, for various reasons, does not always meet science is one of the results of my study. The results demonstrate on the one hand, that teachers in primary education often do not have access to scientific knowledge. It is sometimes difficult for teachers to assess scientific knowledge because of the lack of access to scientific libraries. The outcomes of scientific research are often described in scientific English, and therefore difficult to read plus, in addition most of the scientific educational knowledge is not relevant to practice. This reduces the chances to disseminate the results within the professional field.

On the other hand, the results of my study demonstrate the added value of communication with children -rather than about children- to promote a more successful transition and to increase the awareness of policy makers, school leaders and educators of the importance of involving all stakeholders as equal partners in the interventions to improve the transition process from primary to secondary schools.

### **Target groups**

The transition from primary to secondary school is a cross-school process. The supplying primary school and the receiving secondary school are jointly responsible for the successful progress of this process. In Dutch we call this 'ketenverantwoordelijkheid'.

Aside from the schools, the main target groups for which the results of my thesis have added value are the children who make the transition to secondary school, and their mentors at secondary school. My research contributes to both the scientific literature and the pedagogical practice by providing insight into the expectations of children before and after they make the transition. It explores among others to what extent gender has an effect on experiencing the transition (*Chapter 3*). Awareness of the children's expectations and experiences might allow

teachers to contribute significantly to a deeper understanding of -among others- gender-based- distinctions. The results of my study show that before the transition, the children were particularly interested in the social environment at secondary school. Girls experienced more pre-transition concerns about the school context and mixed feelings about the social context, but were more optimistic about their future classmates than boys. Boys were more interested – in a competitive way –in the possibility of showing off what they had already learned and the chance to show that they could perform well. More than boys, girls appreciated having the opportunity to talk with the mentor. All children expected their mentor to be a nice person, available for a good conversation.

After eight weeks at secondary school, most children in our sample had found their way around their new school. At this point, having friends became important for all children. The children realized that they initially have underestimated the importance of the social-emotional aspects on the transition and that they were not sufficiently prepared to cope successfully with the social-environmental challenges of transition. This insight could then be used by primary and secondary schools to further ease the transition from primary to secondary school.

To give teachers insight in the children’s expectations, in *Chapter 4* the fun and fear factors that the children expected to experience at secondary school are analyzed. In the academic literature little information is found about the role, importance and results of involving children in the mentoring process. My research results can contribute to the knowledge about this rather under researched but important topic. *Chapter 5* contributes to the literature by providing insight into the mentor's actions, furthering our understanding of what children anticipate and fear in the secondary school environment as compared to their actual experiences after the transition.

### **Social (and economic) relevance**

The results of this thesis can, in addition to the scientific relevance, be used to improve the transition from primary to secondary education by including the perspectives of the children and the secondary school mentors of grade seven, particularly with a view to “giving children a voice”. The thesis provides evidence of the ways in which the input from these stakeholders can enhance the transition.

The results of the systematic literature review, in addition to their scientific relevance, can help schools to evaluate, refine, and improve existing interventions to support pupils during the transition process. Furthermore, this evidence helps to identify the children who are most

vulnerable to a poor transition. Consequently, the results of the literature study can help to ensure that interventions are directed and used where they are most needed.

The qualitative research contributes to more goal-oriented and systematic work on educational improvements because the study provides insight into the wishes and views of mentors on the current state of affairs during the transition from primary to secondary education.

The results of my study can also contribute to school development: by giving feedback and by stimulating a dialogue that leads to the implementation of educational innovation. This dialogue leads to substantive conversations between teachers and policy makers and therefore increases professionalization.