

**Book Review**

# Perspectives on Transitions in Schooling and Instructional Practice

Susan E. Elliott-Johns and Daniel H. Jarvis, editors  
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013

Reviewed by: Jennifer Hall  
Monash University

With a focus on transitions in schooling and instructional practice, one would be justified in expecting this book to be an interdisciplinary publication, as transitions are not a field of their own. Rather, researchers in a variety of educational domains—both subject area specialities (e.g., science) and interdisciplinary fields (e.g., educational leadership)—address these topics in their work. Compiling a collection of essays on such a broad topic would understandably be a challenge for any scholar. While the editors did an admirable job with this difficult task, the resulting publication is not without concerns.

The editors of this book, Susan E. Elliott and Daniel H. Jarvis, are professors in the Schulich School of Education at Nipissing University in North Bay, Ontario, Canada, and research literacy and mathematics education, respectively. The editors' research areas and a geographic focus in Canada are reflected in the composition of the book's chapters. Specifically, this 527-page edited book is comprised of 19 chapters written by 26 authors, as well as an Introduction and a Coda written by the editors. Although the book's description depicts the authors as international experts, the authors only represent four countries—Australia, Canada, Singapore, and the United States—three of which are culturally very similar. The majority of the contributors are Canadians writing about research in Canadian (more specifically, Ontario) contexts. While this geographic focus is not a problem as such, the description of the book as containing chapters by international experts seems a bit misleading.

The chapters are grouped into four sections based on chronological transitions in schooling, which are Part I: Early Years (Home/Preschool/Kindergarten) to Early Elementary (Grades 1-3); Part II: Early Elementary (Grades 1-3) to Late Elementary (Grades 4-8); Part III: Late Elementary (Grades 4-8) to Secondary (Grades 9-12); and Part IV: Secondary (Grades 9-12) to Postsecondary (College/University). The chapters are unevenly distributed among the four sections, with four, five, seven, and three chapters, respectively. The inclusion of seven chapters about the elementary to secondary school transition is understandable, given its focus in the extant body of literature. However, the dearth of chapters on the secondary to postsecondary school transition was rather surprising, as a great deal of research exists regarding this particular transition in schooling. For example, a search of the ERIC database for "transition to university/college/postsecondary" results in approximately 8,000 results. As will be discussed, one of the chapters in Part IV did not address the secondary to postsecondary school transition, resulting in only two topic-specific chapters, which seems mismatched when compared to the

number of chapters in the other sections.

Broadly, the book aims to address two main themes, which are “student transitions between major levels of schooling and teacher transitions in instructional practice, in light of contemporary reforms” (p. 3). The edited book is organized into four sections based on the former theme, levels of schooling. In so doing, some of the chapters that address changes in instructional practice therefore feel out of place. These chapters are either not related to a school-level transition or only include a small section on transitions that address the topic in a very cursory manner. As an example of the former, Chapter 19, by Graham, in Part IV addresses teacher candidates’ experiences with educational technology. Teachers at all levels of schooling face issues incorporating technology, and these issues do not relate specifically to the secondary to postsecondary school transition or any particular school-level transition. Therefore, I question the editors’ decision to divide the chapters based on levels of schooling. It feels as though there are two substantial and often not overly-related topics that have been merged into one system of organization. The book could be improved if it was divided into two themes rather than attempting to fit the chapters on instructional practice transitions into a system of school level transitions. Alternatively, the editors could have focused the book on one of these transitions and addressed it in a more rigorous and thorough manner. While the editors argue that there is a “critical relationship between transitions in schooling and instructional practice” (p. 10), the majority of the chapters in this book fail to illustrate a meaningful link between the two topics.

*Part I: Early Years (Home/Preschool/Kindergarten) to Early Elementary (Grades 1-3)* is the most comprehensive and focused section of this book. The four chapters therein focus on the home-to-school transition, as opposed to instructional transitions, and feature contributors from a broad geographic range. Chapter 1, by Cantalini-Williams and Telfer, and Chapter 4, by Binstadt, provide program overviews, with the former focusing on a curricular change to a full-day early learning-kindergarten program in Ontario, and the latter focusing on a transition to school program in Australia. These two chapters provide useful and detailed information to readers regarding the specifics of each program.

Chapters 2, by Yeo, and 3, by Jackson and Cartmel, are clearly aligned with the theme of Part I, the transition from early years to early elementary school. Both chapters address the challenges that children, families, and school personnel face during this transition. Like the other chapters in this section, these two chapters provide specific examples—the Singaporean context and socioeconomically disadvantaged children in Australia, respectively—yet are still written in such a manner that they can be applicable and useful to a general reader. Chapter 3 is notable for its inclusion of data arising from the children themselves, such as interviews and drawings. This book would benefit from including more chapters that include data from studies focusing on children’s views and experiences directly, as opposed to caregivers’ perceptions; such chapters would form a useful complement to those chapters that primarily act as overviews of the literature or those that feature the voices of other stakeholders, such as principals and teachers.

In contrast to Part I, *Part II: Early Elementary (Grades 1-3) to Late Elementary (Grades 4-8)* lacks cohesion as a section and several of the individual chapters are problematic in one or more respects. This section features contributors from a narrow geographic range, with only one of the five chapters written by an author outside a Canadian context. This chapter, Chapter 5, by Akos and Felton, discusses the transition between Grades 2 and 3 in the United States and often speaks in generalities about the challenges of transitioning between these two grade levels,

which seems surprising given the varied schooling experiences and curricula used across the United States. Additionally, quotations from students are used in this chapter without any citations. Chapter 6, by Elliott-Johns, and Chapter 9, by Jordan, focus more generally on the practices of reading instruction and inclusive education, respectively, rather than on transitions involved with these practices. Similarly, Chapter 7, by Sharratt, which discusses scaffolded literacy assessment and provides an example of a professional development model, addresses transitions in a very cursory manner. This chapter is organized in such a way that it is difficult for the reader to follow the arc of the writing. In contrast, Chapter 8, by Small, is very logically ordered. This chapter is a notable exception insofar as it addresses both of the book's themes (transitions in schooling and transitions in instructional practice) in a meaningful manner. Small clearly addresses four significant changes in teaching approaches in elementary mathematics (i.e., focus on problem solving, focus on personal strategies, focus on communication, and acceptance and appreciation of the value of manipulatives and technology in school mathematics). For each change, Small provides thorough discussions of both barriers and possible solutions to using such an approach, as well as issues related to transitions between early and late elementary grade levels.

The penultimate section of this book, *Part III: Late Elementary (Grades 4-8) to Secondary (Grades 9-12)*, is the largest section, containing seven chapters. As with Part II, all but one of the chapters are in Canadian contexts, with the remaining chapter (Chapter 11) featuring a U.S. context. This section is generally quite cohesive, and most of the chapters align with the section's focus on the transition between elementary and secondary school. Chapter 10, by Buzza, Chapter 11, by Choate, Hauser, and Thomas, and Chapter 16, by Hachkowski, each discuss this transition with regard to a specific topic: self-regulated learning, stakeholder perceptions, and Aboriginal education, respectively. These authors all address their specific topic in such a manner that the implications are relevant to a much wider audience.

Chapter 12, by Helling, and Chapter 13, by Jarvis, provide examples of successful programs that provide support during the transition from elementary to secondary school. Helling's chapter summarizes a school board initiative that supports students in this transition and the chapter by Jarvis focuses on a family of schools model that links elementary and secondary school mathematics educators. The level of detail provided in each of these chapters will be useful to others interested in such programs. As with Chapters 6 and 9 in the previous section, Chapter 14, by Kendrick and Rowsell, focuses in detail on a general topic, using visual approaches in literacy education; however, the focus of the book, transitions, is inadequately addressed. Finally, Chapter 15, by Mady, did not appear to fit with either of the book's themes. This chapter addresses the impacts that brief bilingual exchanges have on the adolescents who partake in them. While the evolution from being unilingual to bilingual is certainly a transition, such a linguistic change is neither related to transitions in schooling levels nor transitions in instructional practice. That is, this evolution is a gradual linguistic change that is specific to each individual, which is not specifically related to either of the topics of this book.

The final section of the book, *Part IV: Secondary (Grades 9-12) to Postsecondary (College/University)*, is the shortest, with three chapters, two from a Canadian context and one from a U.S. context. As discussed earlier, Chapter 19, by Graham, clearly addresses the transitions in instructional practice theme of the book in his discussions of working with preservice teachers and technology. However, this chapter is not related to the transition between the secondary and postsecondary levels. In contrast, Chapter 17, by Fowler and Luna, and Chapter 18, by Byers, focus on this transition between schooling levels. Chapter 17 sets the

stage nicely for Chapter 18, with the former providing a historical overview of the topic, while the latter follows with a specific example, transitioning from secondary school mathematics to college-level mathematics. This section is well done but could benefit from the inclusion of additional chapters on this topic to provide wider perspectives and other examples.

Overall, the majority of chapters in this book are well-written, logically organized, and discuss topics of interest to a general education reader. The book would benefit from being more carefully copyedited, as a number of grammatical, spelling, and American Psychological Association formatting errors were found. Furthermore, multiple instances of problematic uses of language related to gender appear. For example, on page 85, Binstadt mentions “males, women, and youth,” which is a concern, as a biological term pertaining to sex, males, is being conflated with a sociocultural term pertaining to gender, women. Another issue that arises relates to the use of terminology that could be specific to a geographic context. For instance, Chapter 18 focuses on college mathematics in Ontario. For a reader outside of the Canadian context, the term *college* could be conflated with the term *university*.

While the book’s organizational structure is problematic insofar as it attempts to sort chapters related to two themes into a structure based on only one theme, this book is quite interesting, with a variety of topics addressed. For general education readers (e.g., bachelor of education students), individuals in administrative positions, or teachers at levels on the margins of these schooling level divisions, such as those who teach Grades 8 and 9, this book provides an overview of current research into challenges in the field, such as providing sufficient professional development for teachers and communicating changes adequately to stakeholders, as well as programs and initiatives that have been undertaken to address them.

### References

Elliott-Johns, S. E., & Jarvis, D. H. (2013). *Perspectives on transitions in schooling and instructional practice*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

---

*Jennifer Hall* is a Lecturer in Early Years/Primary Numeracy at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. Her research focuses on the relationships that students form with mathematics, investigating how their in- and out-of-school experiences influence their views. She is particularly interested in exploring students’ gendered relationships with the subject area and the ways in which gender-related research in mathematics education is conducted.