

RESEARCH TOPIC

A bio-ecological perspective on educational transition: experiences of children, parents and teachers

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This paper explores the potential of Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) as a framework for theory and research in education. It draws on other well-known conceptual approaches, particularly Bourdieu's theories of social reproduction, habitus, field and cultural capital, investigating points of theoretical enhancement and synthesis. This culminates in the development of eight Propositions for a Bio-ecological Framework which are then tested using data from a qualitative examination of two key educational transitions, pre-school to primary and primary to secondary school. Using qualitative methodologies, this research explores perspectives of children, teachers and parents in a case-study primary school in Ireland, the three pre-schools that feed into it, and the two secondary schools into which it feeds. The data yield the key finding that relationships are crucial to positive transitions, perhaps even more important than the contexts in which they take place. Other findings emphasise the impact of diversity (cultural, socio-economic, etc), specific skills for traversing new settings, the importance of time, both personal and socio-historical, and the vital nature of supports for transition, locally and at policy-level. The Propositions of the Bio-ecological Framework are supported by the data indicating that it provides an appropriate conceptual basis for future work. The paper concludes with recommendations for policy, research and practice.

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Researcher Profile

Dr Leah O'Toole is a Lecturer in Educational Psychology at Marino Institute of Education (MIE), an Associated College of Trinity College Dublin. Leah's doctoral thesis was supervised by Prof. Nóirín Hayes (Trinity College Dublin), who is co-author of this paper. Together with Dr Ann Marie Halpenny, Nóirín and Leah have written a book on the relevance of Bronfenbrenner's theories for Early Childhood Education entitled 'Introducing Bronfenbrenner: A Guide for Practitioners and Students in Early Years Education'. It is due to be published by Routledge in 2017.

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In the last decade, the academic mission and scope of MIE's activity has been re-envisioned to encompass a deeper understanding of education in and beyond the classroom, to incorporate the continuum of teacher education and the education of specialist education practitioners at early years, primary and further education levels. This is allied with a commitment to education studies encompassing non-traditional education settings and the wider education environment in a pluralist context.

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MIE will be a centre of global consequence, in teaching and research in the field of education. Through collaboration and technology, it will extend its geographic boundaries and create momentum for the delivery of new, high quality, innovative programmes in education. MIE will build critical mass for world class research in partnership with others, and will foster university-school-community links that contribute to sustainable improvement and renewal across the entire education system.

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