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The transition between primary and secondary school: a thematic review emphasising social and emotional issues

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this review study was to conduct a thematic exploration of prior studies related to the transition between primary and secondary school. The aim of the paper was to discover (1) the extent of earlier research, (2) how earlier research thematises social and emotional issues, and (3) suggestions of those studies concerning how to improve schools. Searches were conducted across four international databases of peer-reviewed research to identify articles published in the last decade on the topic 'transition between primary and secondary school'. Articles related to social and emotional issues were further selected, and thematic analysis was conducted on the selected 29 articles to identify the topical focus. This review study draws attention to the importance of understanding challenges related to the transition between primary and secondary school. Overall, the analysed studies indicate that this is an important focus for educational research. Key issues related to support and wellbeing/bullying have emerged, which clarify the importance of further research in this field. The present study may also contribute to increasing awareness among policy makers and school leaders of the challenges related to the transition between primary and secondary school.

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Introduction

Primary school is defined as a school where the students have a few, close teachers and where the learning is focused on the basics of reading, writing and maths (e.g. Bru et al. 2010). According to Howe (2011), the curriculum in secondary school is dominated by subjects and the students are required to take more responsibility for their own learning. Research shows that the transition from primary to secondary school is both an important and a challenging moment in a child's life (for an overview, see Rodrigues et al. 2018). In addition to increased requirements in secondary school, there are challenges relating to the fact that the primary–secondary transition occurs during early adolescence. This means that students are transitioning from primary to secondary school and from childhood into adulthood. The transition often coincides with puberty, which is a time of physical, intellectual, emotional, and social changes (Richards 2011a, 2011b). The focus of this paper lies in social and emotional issues. According to Strand, students'

emotional experiences during the primary-secondary transition are like ‘an emotional roller coaster’ (2019, 20).

Social changes during adolescence alter an individual’s relationships with other people (Richards 2011a). In a school context, this not only refers to relationships with teachers, peers, and even parents, but also to the support they provide. Emotions also develop during puberty, which means that the students themselves and those to whom they relate need to be aware of hormonal changes. Students go through abrupt changes at different times; therefore, each student will have different needs before, during, and after the transition to secondary school (Richards 2011b).

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979, 26), ‘An ecological transition occurs whenever a person’s position in the ecological environment is altered as a result of a change in role, setting, or both’. Bronfenbrenner also states that roles have ‘a magiclike power’ (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 6) to alter a person’s actions and even what the person thinks and feels. Adolescent development includes one such change in role, as it includes the transition from primary to secondary school. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model positions the individual at the centre of interacting systems, which range from the proximal to the more distal. In this paper, the students are situated at the centre in their transfer to secondary school. The students’ interaction systems in the school context are their relationships with parents, teachers, and peers.

Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this review study is to explore the body of knowledge related to the transition between primary and secondary school over the last decade (cf. Tricco et al. 2018). While this transition involves several topics, this study is limited to considering social and emotional issues. In the study, the following research questions are posed: (1) what is the extent of earlier research on the ‘transition between primary and secondary school’, (2) how do articles thematise social and emotional issues, and (3) what opportunities are suggested to improve schools?

Based on the findings, I also identify limitations in the previous research and discuss how these gaps may pave the way for future research (cf. Tricco et al. 2018).

Methods

The primary focus of this paper is in the transition between mandatory school levels at a time in life when students become adolescents. The analysis was limited to social and emotional issues in mainstream classes. In the following section, the search and selection processes are described.

Search process

According to Moher et al. (2009), systematic reviews and meta-analyses are important for keeping up to date with past research in a specific field of interest. The quality of systematic reviews can vary (Moher et al. 2009; Tricco et al. 2018); therefore, to ensure quality, the checklist of Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) was utilised (see e.g. Tricco et al. 2018).

Automated searches of the ERIC, ERC, WoS and Scopus databases were conducted. These databases were selected as they provide a systematic way of detecting peer-reviewed research journals related to educational research. However, the fact that I only included peer-reviewed articles may have contributed to the omission of reports presenting practitioners' perspectives. Since school systems differ around the world, it was necessary to take these differences into account. Therefore, the search strategies were built upon the following keywords: transition* OR transfer* AND primary school OR elementary school AND lower secondary school OR secondary school OR junior high school OR high school. Later in this paper, the concepts of primary and secondary school will be used.

The search was limited to the last decade (2009–2018) and it was a requirement that articles were written in English. This limited period was selected because Topping (2011) reviewed the transition between primary and secondary school using articles up to 2008. Therefore, this study can be considered a follow-up to Topping's study. Selecting a ten-year period was also a pragmatic choice to make the review manageable.

Article selection process

The search produced 643 articles, 253 of which were duplicates. Through exclusion processes (see Figure 1), 29 articles relevant to social and emotional issues during the transition between primary and secondary school in mainstream classes were selected.

The first articles to be excluded ($n = 172$) were mainly related to adult challenges, where the concept of 'transition between primary and secondary' was mentioned as a previous period. Next, 167 articles were excluded, because although they related to transitions in school, some discussed optional transitions, not the mandatory ones of interest in this review. Some of these articles also compared different school systems or were concerned about student academic achievement and subject-related questions. The last 22 articles to be excluded focused on migrant students or students with special educational needs, not mainstream students. Here, it should be noted that these

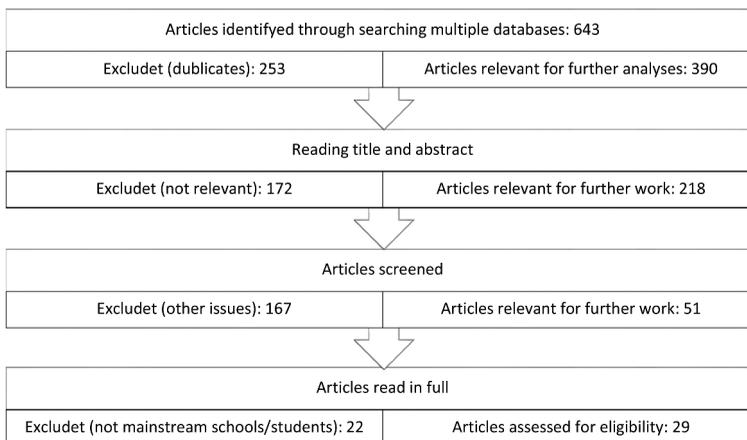


Figure 1. The exclusion process.

particular articles focused on pupils being excluded and these students' perspectives on the transition between primary and secondary school may have been omitted.

Subsequently, the 29 articles assessed for eligibility included data collected from mainstream classes and related to social and emotional issues during the transition between mandatory primary and secondary school.

Analyses process

The selected articles were read in their entirety in light of the research questions. To give an overview of the extent of earlier research on the transition between primary and secondary school (Question 1), I first organised the articles according to the country in which the study was conducted. Furthermore, studies belonging to the same projects were considered in conjunction. I also examined whether the studies were qualitative or quantitative, and which perspective(s) the articles reflected.

Thematic analysis was used to investigate how the articles thematised social and emotional issues (Ryan and Bernard 2003) as per Question 2. Each of the articles was analysed separately to determine themes and then themes from all the articles were systematised together. Three themes crystallised in relation to social and emotional issues in mainstream classes in the transition between primary and lower secondary school: (1) parents and teachers' support, (2) peers' support and friendship, and (3) belonging and wellbeing vs. victimisation and bullying. Thematic analyses was also used to discover any suggestions for opportunities to improve schools in terms of social and emotional issues related to the transition between primary and lower secondary school.

The analysis of the 29 articles is presented in the following section. (See also Appendix)

Results and discussion

Based on the research questions, the aim of this study was to address three issues regarding the transition between primary and secondary school: (1) the extent of earlier research, (2) how earlier research thematised social and emotional issues, and (3) suggestions in these studies about how to improve schools.

The extent of earlier research

The majority of the 29 articles was research conducted in Australia (15 studies), while seven were written in the United Kingdom, three in the United States, and one each in The Netherlands, Canada, Norway, and Japan (see [table 1](#)). Ten of these articles used data from two largescale longitudinal surveys.

As stated, the search was limited to the period 2009–2018. A concentration of articles were published between 2011 and 2015 (24 articles); this may imply a decline in interest in this research field in the latter years. The articles drawing on the two projects in Australia were published during this period, and several were written by the same authors. In the databases consulted, only one article was published in 2016 and none in 2017 or 2018. That half of the research was conducted in Australia and a quarter in the

Table 1. Number of articles published, country and year.

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Australia		1		2	2	6	3	1			15
UK		1	2	2	1		1				7
US			2		1						3
Canada	1										1
Netherland				1							1
Norway		1									1
Japan				1							1
Total	1	3	4	6	4	6	4	1			29

United Kingdom may indicate these countries had a special focus on this topic. The fact that these articles were published almost simultaneously reinforces this assumption.

The studies mainly entailed quantitative surveys (23). One study used mixed methods, and five used qualitative methods. Furthermore, 20 studies were longitudinal consisting of between two and seven waves. One article considered the teachers' perspective. All the other articles reflect the voices and the experiences of the students. In addition to the students, teachers and staff were informants in four articles, three of which had students, teachers, staff and parents as informants (see Appendix). My conclusion from searching for research related to social and emotional issues identifies articles that highlight student experiences. Topping (2011) likewise concludes that students focus on social and emotional issues, while teachers focus on school issues. This is reinforced by the fact that the only study, which took the teachers' perspective, highlights school factors (Hopwood, Hay, and Dyment 2016).

Social and emotional characteristics in mainstream classes

Two articles were reviews (Hanewald 2013; Topping 2011). Topping (2011) selected 88 articles and examined how they presented the differences between students' and teachers' perspectives on the transition between primary and secondary school. He found that students focus on social and emotional issues (such as peers, bullying, and mental health), while teachers focus on issues of attainment (such as curriculum, school strategies, practice tests, technology, and support from peers and teachers). Hanewald (2013) selected 37 articles and examined students' experiences throughout transition. She found some critical aspects, such as belonging and wellbeing, support from teachers and parents, connection between family and school, and the role of peers.

The issues highlighted by these two reviews are in accordance with the issues that emerge from the analysis of articles in this review. On the basis of the thematic analysis, the remainder of this section is further divided into three subheadings: parents' and teachers' support, peers' support and friendship, and belonging and wellbeing vs. victimisation and bullying.

Some articles are related to more than one theme. Due to the scope of this paper, only a brief presentation of the studies is mentioned for the first time.

Parents' and teachers' support

Of the four articles that highlight parental support in the transition between primary and secondary school (table 2, Theme 1), Duchesne et al. (2009) examined prospective

Table 2. Articles showing social and emotional characteristics.

Themes	Author(s)
1. Parental support 4 studies	Darmody, Robson, and McMahon 2012 Duchesne et al. 2009 Vaz et al. 2015a Waters, Lester, and Cross 2014a
2. Teachers' support 7 studies	Bailey and Baines, 2012 Bru et al. 2010 Hopwood, Hay, and Dymont 2016 Trotman, Tucker, and Martyn 2015 Martínez et al. 2011 Ryan, Shim, and Makara 2013 Tobbell and O'Donnell 2013
3. Peers' support and friendship 13 studies	Darmody, Robson, and McMahon 2012 Güroglu et al., 2012 Lester et al. 2012 Lester and Cross 2014a Lester and Cross 2015 Maher 2010 Martínez et al. 2011 Ryan, Shim, and Makara 2013 Trotman, Tucker, and Martyn 2015 Tsuzuki 2012 Vaz et al. 2015a Waters, Lester, and Cross 2014a Waters et al. 2012
4. Belonging and wellbeing vs. victimisation and bullying 15 studies	Lester et al. 2012 Lester, Waters, and Cross 2013 Lester and Cross 2014a Lester and Cross 2014b Lester and Cross 2015 Pellegrini and van Ryzin 2011 Rice, Frederickson, and Seymour 2011 Trotman, Tucker, and Martyn 2015 Vaz et al. 2014a Vaz et al. 2014b Vaz et al. 2015a Vaz et al. 2015b Waters et al. 2012 Waters, Lester, and Cross 2014b West, Sweeting, and Young 2010

emotional problems during transition and the students' relationship with their parents in this period of change. In the study, Canadian students ($N = 636$) answered a questionnaire before their entry into secondary school. The results show that support from parents, especially the mother, predicted fewer anxiety symptoms across the transition. Meanwhile, Vaz et al. (2015a) aimed to find factors associated with school belongingness in a quantitative study among 395 Australian students. They claim that students were more likely to experience a sense belonging to their new school if their parents reported high levels of involvement in school-based activities.

Darmody, Robson, and McMahon (2012) conducted a longitudinal, mixed methods study in Ireland. The informants were students ($n = 916$), principals ($n = 567$), teachers ($n = 103$) and parents ($n = 81$). They found that parents (and siblings) contributed to the child's social capital, which was in turn important for transition. An interesting finding was that students with positive interactions with their parents also had better relationships to their teachers in secondary school. Waters, Lester, and Cross (2014a) examined students' expectations and experiences pre- and post-transition. A total of

967 students answered questionnaires at the end of primary and the beginning of secondary school. They found that the presence of parents was the most significant predictor of an easy transition. They concluded that students who have established good connections with their teachers in primary school will experience a more positive transition and will create qualitative connections with their teachers more easily in secondary school.

Seven other articles highlight teachers' support as it relates to social and emotional aspects of transition (table 2, Theme 2). All state the contextual shift from having one teacher in primary school to having a number of teachers in secondary, and the importance of developing connections between teachers and students at secondary level. In a qualitative study among students ($n = 49$) and staff ($n = 10$) in the UK, Trotman, Tucker, and Martyn (2015) found that students in primary school had good relationship with their teachers. However, they also claim that teachers in secondary school are 'disconnected' and that students have 'feelings of being "lost" physically and emotionally' (244). Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013) also focused on students' relationships with new teachers across transition in a qualitative study from the UK ($N = 35$). They found that the shift from one close teacher in primary to a number of subject teachers in secondary was challenging; however, some students also reported the benefits of leaving their primary school teacher behind.

Martínez et al. (2011) followed 140 American students in two cohorts from the end of primary to the end of secondary school to examine social support across the transition. They found no significant decline in teacher support for boys; however, for girls, teacher support declined significantly across the transition. In a study from Norway, which included 7,205 students, Bru et al. (2010) illustrated a linear downwards tendency in perceived teacher support during years 5–7 in primary school through to years 8–10 in secondary. However, they found no abrupt decline across the transition. Ryan, Shim, and Makara (2013) conducted a two-year longitudinal study following 738 students in the United States across the transition from primary to secondary school. Unlike the previous studies, they claimed that the students retained the same positive feelings towards their teachers in secondary as in primary school.

Bailey and Baines (2012) conducted pre- and post-transfer questionnaires with 133 students and their teachers, and examined differences between teachers' and students' perspectives. They claimed that teachers' support was important to the students; however, support for vulnerable students was especially important to the teachers. One article merely explored the teachers' perspective (Hopwood, Hay, and Dymont 2016). Twelve teachers at both primary and secondary levels were interviewed to identify their perceptions of best practices to prepare students for a successful transition. They concluded that curriculum continuity, communication between primary and secondary schools, and adequate teacher support were essential for a successful transition.

These articles, like earlier research (see Howe 2011), highlight the differences in teachers' support at primary and secondary schools. Scaffolding and relationship building in secondary school to integrate parents and other support services are suggested in these articles. Furthermore, while educational policies are a governmental responsibility and school leaders have a duty to establish programmes to develop schools, this perspective is hardly mentioned in the articles.

Peers' support and friendship

It is clear that their relationship with peers is important for students in transition, which was highlighted in 13 studies (table 2, Theme 3). Six of these studies have already been mentioned with reference to parents and teachers' support; therefore, in this section, I will merely demonstrate the importance of these studies in understanding peer friendships across transition. Waters, Lester, and Cross (2014a) found that parents' presence was the most important factor during transition; however, they also found that support from peers was the most influential factor preceding their entry into secondary school. They highlight the responsibility of primary schools and the importance of preparing students for the transition. Trotman, Tucker, and Martyn (2015) also highlight the need for teachers' support in secondary and the benefits of peer support both during the transition and post-transfer.

Darmody, Robson, and McMahan (2012), who found that both parents and teachers were important through the transition, also highlight the importance of friends for students' acquisition of social capital. They claim that this is consequently vital for a positive transition. Vaz et al. (2015a) found that, in addition to parental involvement, social acceptance by peers is significant. Martínez et al. (2011) highlighted that social support from friends was a fundamental factor related to transition. They also identified gender differences in experiences of peer support. For girls, the experience of peer support decreased through transition, while boys reported increased peer support.

Four of the articles related to peer support were based on data from the Supportive School Project (SSP). Surveys were completed by a cohort of Australian students ($N = 3,459$) from 20 schools at the beginning and end of their first year in secondary school. Based on findings from this data, Lester and Cross (2015) found that, on average, students felt supported by their peers. They also found students with peer problems were more likely to experience a negative transition (Lester and Cross 2014a). Lester et al. (2012) claimed the importance of peer support at the commencement of secondary school, and Waters et al. (2012) found that students who had a positive transition experience at the beginning of secondary school reported greater feelings of peer support at the end of the first year.

Güroğlu et al. (2012) conducted a longitudinal quantitative study in The Netherlands that followed 540 students across the primary–secondary transition, to examine consistency and change in students' social competence and friendships. They found consistency in the extent of sociability among friendships across the transition, claiming that students' friendships across school transition are determined to a large extent by the level of sociability among peer groups: when shy and withdrawn students enter a new context after the transition, they form friendships with similar students as in primary school. Ryan, Shim, and Makara (2013) indicated that students' social networks are disrupted when they transition to secondary school. Nevertheless, they found that students' self-worth around friends (and teachers, as mentioned earlier) was stable or improved through the transition to secondary school.

Tsuzuki (2012) conducted a longitudinal study of approximately 1100 students each year from years 4 to 6 in primary and years 7 to 9 in secondary school. It was found that primary students who expect social support from friends in secondary school had more positive thoughts about transition. Just as Bru et al. (2010) found a linear downwards tendency for perceived teacher support, Tsuzuki (2012) found that the students' hope for the future gradually declined; however, the levels before and after school transition were almost the same.

Maher (2010) used a qualitative methodology to collect data from 22 students and their teacher in the final year of primary school. He aimed to determine whether using the Internet to communicate with students and teachers in secondary school enabled students to learn about life in secondary before transition. He concluded that despite both identity and architectural challenges, such an interaction offered good preparation for secondary school, and the primary school students were able to build relationships with students in secondary school.

As initially stated, the need for peers during transition is evident. Students report the benefit of peer support both pre- and post-transition, and analysis shows that students with peer problems are more likely to experience transition negatively. The importance of peers during transition in the context of low sociability among friendships and disrupted networks indicates that both primary and secondary schools need to take responsibility for the socialisation process during transition.

Belonging and wellbeing vs. victimisation and bullying

Issues related to belonging and wellbeing or victimisation and bullying were highlighted in 15 articles (see table 2, Theme 4). Six of these articles are also discussed in the previous section.

Data from the Australian SSP project was utilised in seven articles related to this theme (Lester et al. 2012; Lester and Cross 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Waters et al. 2012; Lester, Waters, and Cross 2013; Waters, Lester, and Cross 2014b). Lester et al. (2012), who highlight the importance of peer support across transition, found that peer support was also a protective factor for bullying prevention. Lester, Waters, and Cross (2013) found that during transition, students experienced a reduced sense of belonging and wellbeing, and some reported symptoms of depression and anxiety. They claimed that in all likelihood, students who had problems in primary school would find the move to a new school more problematic than other students. Waters, Lester, and Cross (2014b) explored the connection between students' expectations and their experiences across the transition to secondary school. They found that the majority of students had positive experiences, and that positive expectations contributed to better experiences. Lester and Cross (2014a, 2014b, 2015) claim that, on average, students experienced a sense of belonging and wellbeing in secondary school throughout the primary–secondary transition. However, they also found that approximately half the students included in the study experienced some kind of victimisation. Boys reported more emotional and behavioural difficulties than girls, and students with peer problems were more likely to be in stable or increasing victimisation groups.

The studies describe major differences in the number of students who reported both positive and negative experiences with transition. As previously Lester and Cross (2014a, 2014b, 2015) identified some kind of victimisation among approximately half of students, while Waters et al. (2012), also utilising SSP-data, found that two thirds of students had a positive experience related to peer support, experiencing feeling of belonging and wellbeing in their first year of secondary school. The remaining studies reported social and emotional challenges such as depression, anxiety, and bullying. West, Sweeting, and Young (2010) conducted a longitudinal quantitative survey in the United Kingdom among 2,371 students in the final year of primary and the first year of secondary, and claimed that wellbeing is more related to personal conditions than school conditions. They found that only a quarter of the students surveyed had solely positive experiences across transition; half had some

difficulties, and a quarter experienced a very problematic transition, including bullying. There may be various reasons for the differences in the reported degree of wellbeing, including methodological ones; however, this ambiguity makes it difficult to ascertain the proportion of students who had either good or bad experiences during transition.

Vaz et al. (2014a), Vaz et al. (2014b), 2015b) investigated which personal and contextual factors were of importance to wellbeing during the primary–secondary transition among 266 Australian students. They found that personal factors were significant for wellbeing, and claimed that social and emotional competence are associated with belongingness in secondary school. Vaz and colleagues also claimed that wellbeing at the end of the primary phase has consequences for wellbeing and belonging in secondary school. Pellegrini and van Ryzin (2011) observed and interviewed American students ($N = 138$) and their teachers to examine the role of peers in bullying and victimisation during the transition to secondary school. They found that affiliation with peers decreased in secondary, and they emphasised the importance of social networks during the school day in secondary school. Like Lester et al. (2012), they claimed that friends serve as protectors and mitigate bullying. Trotman, Tucker, and Martyn (2015), who found that students ‘felt lost’ when starting secondary, claimed that behavioural problems across the transition may lead to a negative impact on students’ wellbeing.

Vaz et al. (2015a) found positive interactions among peers to be useful for school belongingness. They highlight social acceptance as a central issue through the transition to secondary school. They found that students who were bullied also had low belongingness in school. Belonging and wellbeing were not related to socioeconomic status. However, girls reported higher levels of school belongingness than boys. Waters, Lester, and Cross (2014b) also identified gender differences, in that girls were more anxious at the end of primary; however, they demonstrated higher social skills across transition.

Rice, Frederickson, and Seymour (2011) collected data from The School Concern Questionnaire (SCQ) in the United Kingdom, and assessed the continuity of school concerns for some students ($N = 57$) by comparing student behaviour and feelings in the last term of primary and the first term of secondary. They found that changes in the peer environment and bullying were the most highly reported concerns both pre- and post-transition. Post-transition concerns for boys and girls were almost identical; however, girls expressed more positive attitudes towards school and teachers in secondary school than boys. Approximately a quarter of the analysed articles related their findings to gender. Even with some differences of opinion, a significant finding from all the studies is that girls have higher levels of belongingness and wellbeing post-transition. However, girls report decreased peer and teacher support in secondary school, while boys do not. This may be an indication that girls, more than boys, appreciate close networks in primary school.

Opportunities to improve schools

An additional aim of this paper is to address suggestions presented in the reviewed articles on how to improve schools. All the studies highlight at least one implication, with some articles providing recommendations for advising schools in developing programmes to aid the transition from primary to secondary.

As table 3, Theme 1 shows, three articles call for responsibility from policy makers, demanding curriculum continuity between primary and secondary school and educational

policies related to transition. Since these studies show that a large number of students do experience challenges during the transition (although estimates vary slightly across the articles), it is evident that policy makers and school leaders need to take more responsibility for ensuring a smooth transition for students. Accordingly, it would seem sensible for the transition between primary and secondary school to be regulated in binding documents.

The need for active communication between primary and secondary schools (table 3, Theme 2) is highlighted in five articles. Topping (2011) also asserts that teachers in secondary schools need to learn from primary teachers in terms of supervising students as thoroughly as they do in primary.

Seven articles highlight supervising, scaffolding and relationship building between students and teachers in secondary school (table 3, Theme 3). Waters et al. (2012) also advise integrating support from school counsellors and other support services. Even though this review was based on studies that focused on mainstream students, three articles mentioned the importance of building appropriate scaffolds for all students (table 3, Theme 4), to account for student diversity. Three articles highlight the importance of cooperation between school and home, and the significance of involving parents in transition programmes (table 3, Theme 5).

According to seven of the studies, transition programmes would help smooth the transition between primary and secondary schools (table 3, Theme 6). Transition programmes

Table 3. Articles showing different opportunities to improve schools.

Themes	Author(s)
1. Responsibility from policy makers 3 studies	Hopwood, Hay, and Dymont 2016 Vaz et al. 2015a West, Sweeting, and Young 2010
2. Active communication between primary and secondary schools 5 studies	Bailey and, Baines, 2012 Hopwood, Hay, and Dymont 2016 Lester, Waters, and Cross 2013 Topping 2011 Vaz et al. 2014b
3. Relation building between students and teachers in secondary school 7 studies	Bru et al. 2010 Hanewald 2013 Hopwood, Hay, and Dymont 2016 Lester, Waters, and Cross 2013 Topping 2011 Vaz et al. 2014a Waters et al. 2012
4. Building appropriate scaffolds for <i>all</i> students 3 studies	Tsuzuki 2012 Vaz et al. 2014b Vaz et al. 2015b
5. Cooperation between school and home 3 studies	Duchesne et al. 2009 Lester and Cross 2014a Waters, Lester, and Cross 2014b
6. Develop transition programs 7 studies	Lester et al. 2012 Lester and Cross 2014a Lester and Cross 2014b Pellegrini and van Ryzin 2011 Rice, Frederickson, and Seymour 2011 Trotman, Tucker, and Martyn 2015 Waters, Lester, and Cross 2014a
7. Develop programs for prevention of bullying 4 studies	Lester and Cross 2014a Lester and Cross 2014b Pellegrini and van Ryzin 2011 Trotman, Tucker, and Martyn 2015

need to be tailored to the students in each school and, according to Waters, Lester, and Cross (2014a), students should be involved in the process of developing the programme.

Peers and the importance of belonging are, as made evident in these articles, of interest in almost all studies. Four of the articles that promote transition programmes link them especially to the development of friendships and prevention of bullying (table 3, Theme 7). Accordingly, schools may use the Internet as a communication tool to prepare students for the transition, as shown in Maher's (2010) study.

Concluding remarks

The purpose of this study was to map articles about social and emotional issues related to the transition between primary and secondary school for the period 2009 to 2018. Further, the aim was to investigate how these studies thematise this issue and identify possible suggestions in the articles for improving transition. The findings suggest that scholars in few countries highlight this issue. I also demonstrate – like Topping's review (2011) – that it is mainly the students who give these issues attention. Like Hanewald's review (2013), this study also highlights the importance of support from parents, teachers, and peers during transition. In addition, this study conveys the connection between a positive transition and a sense of belonging/wellbeing in secondary school. Furthermore, the study indicates possible gender differences. Finally, this study also highlights the occurrence of bullying during transition.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of the approach adopted. The first concerns the specific time period (2009–2018). The reason for this limit was that Topping (2011) selected articles up to 2008; therefore, this study may be seen in sequence with this work. However, Topping (2011) did not limit the study to social and emotional issues, so the present study does not follow directly. Second, because some articles were excluded after reading the abstract, it is possible that some relevant articles may have been missed. However, in cases of doubt, the whole article was skimmed. In addition, some articles were excluded after having been read in full because their main focus was not social and emotional issues. However, in some of these articles, these issues occurred as a co-theme. The last exclusion was the focus on mainstream schools and students. Some of the articles that related to migrants or students with special educational needs could also have provided valuable knowledge on this matter.

Finally, the inclusion of only articles published in English is recognised as a limitation. Eighteen abstracts were written in English, but the full text was written in either German or French. These articles (together with articles fully written in other languages) could have provided new insights to the field. All the studies were from Western countries, with a majority from Australia and the UK. With respect to other educational systems, this selection is limited.

As with this study, the articles analysed have some limitations. This thematic review revealed a predominance of quantitative studies. Even if the students' voices are important, it is a limitation that the students are almost entirely the only participants. It would be valuable for future research to include qualitative methodologies and in-depth analyses of data to understand all aspects of the transition, from the perspectives of students, parents, teachers, and school leaders. In addition, it would be helpful to perform

document analysis on key policies, at both governmental and school levels, to investigate how these documents shed light on the transition between primary and secondary school.

As this review demonstrates, the transition from primary to secondary school may illicit social and emotional challenges for the students. Variations in terms of the amount of positive and negative experiences and in findings related to gender demand further research. In addition, limitations in methodological choice and in country of origin show the importance of further research in this field. As this study shows, there are many aspects of social and emotional issues that affect primary–secondary transition. It is hoped that this review can help policymakers, school leaders, and scholars in the understanding of transition between primary and secondary school.

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Appendix: Overview of the studies included in the thematic analysis, listed as in the order in finding section

Author/year	Country	School level/age	Method	Participants	Implications/opportunities/recommendation
Topping 2011	UK		Review	88 articles	Secondary teachers are encouraged to supervise students as thoroughly as teachers of younger students
Hanewald 2013	AU		Review	37 articles	Contributes to raising the awareness and understanding of how teachers may assist students during the transition
Darmody, Robson, McMahon 2012	UK	Primary and Lower secondary Ages 12–13	Longitudinal Mixed method	Student (n = 916) Principal (n = 567) Teacher (n = 103) Parent (n = 81)	Be aware of the importance of peers at the time of transition from primary to secondary school
Duchesne, Ratelle, Poitras, Drouin 2009	CAN	Elementary prior middle school, age 12	Quantitative Questionnaires	Student (N = 626)	Parents should be informed about the transition in general and about the new school in particular
Vaz, M., Falkner, Ciccarelli, Passmore, Parsons, Tan, T. Falkner 2015a	AU	Primary, final year, age 12	Quantitative Questionnaire	Student (n = 395) Teacher/Parent (n = 87)	Each of the 15 most significant factors identified can be shaped by educators and policy reforms in the various education systems
Waters, Lester, Cross 2014a	AU	Primary, final year Secondary, first year	Longitudinal (W1-2) Quantitative Questionnaire	Student (N = 967)	Transition programmes need to be tailored to the students in each school, and schools have to involve students in developing such programmes
Bailey, Baines 2012	UK	Primary, end year 6 Secondary, 6 months after transition	Longitudinal (W1-2) Quantitative Questionnaires	Student (N = 133) Teacher questionnaire on individual students Student (N = 7205)	Understanding the need for a more coordinated approach between primary and secondary schools during the transition
Bru, Stormes, Munthe, Thuen 2010	NO	Primary, year 5–7 Lower secondary, year 8–10	Quantitative Questionnaire	Teacher, primary (n = 5) Teacher, secondary (n = 7)	The importance of building good relations with students through interesting and meaningful school work
Hopwood, Hay, Dymont 2016	AU	Primary, year 6 Secondary, year 7	Qualitative Individual interviews	Student (N = 738)	Essentials for successful transition: curriculum continuity, communication between primary and secondary schools, and adequate teacher support
Martínez, Arica, Graves, Peters-Myszak, Nellis 2011	US	Elementary, end of 5 th grade Junior high, end of 6 th grade	Longitudinal (W1-2) Quantitative Questionnaire	Student (N = 140)	Offer students school-based support during the transition and implement prevention programmes that foster friendships (especially among girls)
Ryan, Shim, Makara 2013	US	Elementary, 6 th grade Middle school, 7 th grade	Longitudinal (W1-4) Quantitative Questionnaire	Teacher (N = 738) Student (N = 738)	Specific attention by educators paid to discovering patterns in exclusion, and developing strategies to alter this pattern

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Author/year	Country	School level/age	Method	Participants	Implications/opportunities/recommendation
Tobbell, O'Donnell 2013	UK	Primary, final year High school, first year Ages 11–12	Qualitative Observation, interview, document analysis	Student (N = 35)	The school needs to support the students to give the opportunity for relationship formation
Trotman, Tucker, Martyn 2015	UK	Secondary, ages 14–15	Qualitative Semi-structured interview	Student (n = 49) Behaviour coordinators (n = 8) Principal (n = 2) Student (N = 322)	Contributes to improved management of behaviour referrals and exclusions Importance of awareness to the role of friendship during the transition
Güroglu, Antonius, Cillissen, Gerbert, Haselager, Cornelis, van Lieshout 2012	NL	Elementary school, age 11 Secondary school, age 14	Longitudinal (W1-2) Quantitative		
Lester, Cross, Shaw, Dooley 2012	AU	Primary, final year, grade 7 Secondary, beginning of 8 th grade Secondary, end of 8 th grade Secondary, end of 9 th grade	Supportive Schools Project (SSP) Longitudinal (W1-4) Quantitative Questionnaire	Student (N = 1771)	The need for transition programmes with a focus on early and targeted intervention prior to the transition and within the first year of secondary school
Lester, Cross 2014a	AU	See Lester 2012			The importance of having an effective transition programme from primary to secondary school which emphasises social skill development and interaction Primary schools must establish quality connections to peers who may provide support for one another before the transition and secondary schools need practices enabling connectedness during the transition
Lester, Cross 2015	AU	See Lester 2012			The value of using the internet as a tool for communication to make the transition a more positive experience
Maher 2010	AU	Primary, final year, 6 th grade, age 11–12	Longitudinal Qualitative Observation, interview, Recording online interactions	Student (n = 22) Teacher (n = 1)	
Tsuzuki 2012	JP	Elementary, 4 th – 6 th grade Junior high, 7 th – 9 th grade	Longitudinal (W1-7) Questionnaire	Student (N = 15,718)	The need to look carefully at individual differences during the transition
Waters, Lester, Wenden, Cross 2012	AU	Secondary, first year	Supportive Schools Project (SSP) Quantitative Questionnaire	Student (N = 1500)	School counsellors and other support services need to be fully integrated into school transition programmes

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Author/year	Country	School level/age	Method	Participants	Implications/opportunities/recommendation
Lester, Waters, Cross 2013	AU	See Lester 2012			Highlights the importance of fostering positive classroom management and social support systems in primary school and the beginning of secondary school
Lester, Cross 2014b	AU	See Lester 2012		Student (N = 1800)	The importance of implementing school prevention programmes against bullying during the transition that also involve the families
Pellegrini, Van Ryzin 2011	US	Primary, 5 th grade Middle school, 6 th and 7 th grade	Longitudinal (W1-3) Qualitative Observation, interview	Student (n = 138) Teacher (n not stated)	Implement peer tutoring and cooperative learning Develop and implement transition programs to improve peer socialisation skills
Rice, Frederickson, Seymour 2011	UK	Primary student, 6 th year Secondary student, 7 th year	Longitudinal Quantitative Questionnaire	Student, primary (n = 147) Student, secondary (n = 263)	The importance of The School Concerns Questionnaire (SCQ) in developing universal programmes aiming to smooth the primary to secondary school transition
Vaz, Parsons, T. Falkmer, Passmore, M. Falkmer 2014a	AU	Primary, 6 month before end Secondary, 6 month after transition	Longitudinal (W1-2) Quantitative Questionnaire	Student (N = 266)	The importance of personal and school contextual factors that influence students' primary-secondary school transition
Vaz, M. Falkmer, Parsons, Passmore, Parkin, T. Falkmer 2014b	AU	See Vaz et al. 2014a			Primary and secondary schools may see the importance of building appropriate scaffolds for all the students to be assured of their belonging
Vaz, M. Falkmer, Ciccarelli, Passmore, Parsons, Black, Cuomo, Tan, T. Falkmer 2015b	AU	See Vaz et al. 2014a			The importance of support for, and sensitivity to, student diversity during the transition
Waters, Lester, Cross 2014b	AU	See Waters, Lester, and Cross 2014a			Active communication between the primary and secondary schools before and after the transition to empower parents to become more engaged in supporting their children through the transition
West, Sweeting, Young 2010	UK	Primary, final year, age 11 Secondary, 2 nd year, age 13 Secondary, 4 th year, age 15	Longitudinal (W1-3) Quantitative Questionnaire	W1 Student all waves (N = 2196) Teachers for 581 students Parents for 86% of the students	The educational policies should recognise the importance of both the formal and informal social systems involved in the transition