A Threelfold Perspective on the Challenges of the Transition to Secondary School in French-Speaking Switzerland

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Abstract

In Switzerland, pupils reaching the end of their 8th year of primary school are guided according to their academic results. This guidance process is essential, as it will determine whether children go on to vocational training or to gymnasium studies and represents a major challenge for both the children and their parents. The stakes are all the higher in French-speaking Switzerland, where vocational training is often perceived as less attractive. This period can be particularly stressful for pupils, parents, and teachers alike. The teacher’s role as a source of guidance and support is both difficult and important during that time. Still, for the pupils this is a crucial moment since it is synonymous with an initial selection and guidance process so it has a defining influence on the students’ educational biographies (Niederhauser & Hascher, 2022; Pohlmann-Rother et al., 2023; Van Ophuysen, 2018) and will determine his or her transition either to vocational or to gymnasium studies. The present pilot study aims to better understand the socio-affective and cognitive issues emerging during this transitional period in the context of French-speaking Switzerland, and this, from a threefold perspective: that of the students, the teachers, as well as the parents. Courses of action for Headteachers regarding the measures to be taken to improve the transition process are suggested, as well as recommendations for school management on how to best facilitate this defining period in children’s lives.

Keywords: Transition, Risk and Protective Factors, Teenagers, Primary school, Secondary school