the traditional instructional delivery modalities directed to traditional aged students. While recognizing the continuing education needs of teachers, the essays largely hardly acknowledge those of middle-aged professionals, tradesmen and other workers long passed their formal schooling. Hence the text will be of limited value to those seeking guidance for these burgeoning groups.

W. Patrick Leonard
Allegheny County Community College, Monroeville, PA 15146, USA
E-mail address: pleonard@ccac.edu

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Processes of Transition in Education Systems
Elizabeth McLeish and David Phillips (Eds.): Symposium Books, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, United Kingdom, 1998, pp. 102, Price $38.00 paperback.

Since the collapse of the communist systems in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe transformation has become one of the outstanding topics in the social sciences. It has been discussed by political scientists, sociologists and economists and soon gained cross-disciplinary relevance in theoretical analyses based upon the examination of hypotheses and models. The contribution of education to these processes, though underexposed as against the mainstream of the social sciences, is worth to be given particular interest. This statement can be substantiated by the twofold role played by education as a systemic instrument of policy-making as well as a driving force of transformation per se. The latter role has been often underestimated in cross-disciplinary analyses, which is surprising enough in view of the fact that the initiators and agents of transformation are the products of educational processes within and outside their formal components (schools).

The authors of the booklet in review provide solid and stimulating insight into this twofold role of education in the transformation processes of the countries selected. This quality becomes evident whenever the tensions between the “macro-level transition” (of political decisions and their implementation in the administration networks) and the “micro-level transition” (as the constraints of everyday school reality) is tackled, whether in Elizabeth A. McLeish’s conceptual introduction (p. 18) or in the state-of-the-art comments in the respective contexts (e.g. pp. 32, 46-47, 58-59). Let alone this intrinsic quality, the study is distinguished by the following four features.

First, it is presented as the outcome of a team-based project which was conducted at the internationally well-reputed Centre for Comparative Studies in Education in Oxford (Director: David Phillips). Despite the smallness of the research group—Elizabeth A. McLeish, Julia Bekker, Natasha Kersh, Nina Arnhold, Stephanie Wilde—the team-based approach has laid the foundation for a surprisingly stringent coherence characterizing the descriptive and analytical structures of the individual chapters. Second, it is true that the confinement of the research objects on East Germany and Latvia cannot claim representative validity for the post-communist region in total. McLeash’s exemplary argument that “the GDR was and is not a phenomenon unique to this (i.e. the German) nation or even to the former Soviet bloc countries as a whole” (p. 50), is certainly plausible with regard to macro-level considerations of transformation, but does not prove true, as soon as the imposition of structures and curricula of West German origin on the education systems of the restituted East German Laender is put on the agenda. This confinement, however, is convincingly compensated by the inclusion of post-apartheid South Africa in the project, whose applicability as a distinctive research object is confirmed by Julia Bekker’s paper. Third, all the four authors succeed in reconciling the peculiarities of their “national cases” with the leading questions inherent in the pre-designed model. This quality enables the reader to make comparative references to the other education systems presented and, moreover, to further “countries in transformation”. Finally, the thematic composition of the project indicates a remarkable balance, as concerns the transformation processes at the national education levels in general (McLeash: East Germany, Kersh: Latvia, Bekker: South Africa) and, though only related to East Germany, noteworthy selected fields (Arnhold: teacher education, Wilde: Gesamtschulen/comprehensive schools). The informative quality of the two latter essays is reinforced by the authors’ detailed presentation of diversities related to the Laender policies within the federal education system of Germany.

It should not raise any astonishment that this well-conceptualized and thoroughly elaborated study leaves some questions open. On the one hand the title signals the authors’ preference of transition to transformation as the notion to define the processes analyzed. In her conceptual argumentation McLeash, however, applies both notions in an interchangeable manner (e.g. p. 14), thereby ignoring recent suggestions to demarcate their contents against each other. On the other hand the focus of the study is set on the political component of educational transformation “from authoritarian rule to democratic government” (ibid.). This decision is acceptable with regard to the internal consistency of the project, but includes a tendency towards neglecting the impact of economic developments on the national transformation processes in education nevertheless. Moreover, it causes a certain incongruity with McLeash’s conceptual identification of the “economic dimension” as “an important one” (ibid.) and with some remarks in the country-based
Parents as Partners in Schooling:

This volume reports on research performed by the OECD’s Centre For Educational Research and Innovation on developing partnerships between parents and schools. The study is divided into two parts: the first examines the socio-economic context of educational reform, and the second details the results of individual country studies. The OECD explored policy initiatives related to parent-school partnering in nine developed countries. The countries consist of Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Spain, the United Kingdom (England and Wales) and the United States.

The report identifies numerous reasons for an increased interest in partnership development between parents and schools. In particular, the report identifies parents as the first-and in at least one country (Ireland), the primary-educators of children. Policy initiatives in each country indicate that there is, at a minimum, a shared responsibility between the school and parents in the educational process. As noted in the OECD report, there is considerable documentation in the literature suggesting that the home environment and parental involvement in teaching positively affects learning. The countries included in the study, with one exception, saw parental involvement as a means of improving lagging academic performance of school children. Japan, the exception, sees parental partnering as a means of encouraging a more balanced educational experience for children. Historically, the Japanese have focused intense effort on academic performance at the expense of physical and creative learning, as well as leisure.

Key to effective partnering is the network of established communication between parents and the school. There is little that legislation can accomplish with respect to requiring parents to communicate with the school. The OECD did, however, identify statutes in most countries that require schools to maintain a flow of information toward the home. This communication takes on numerous forms including report cards, parent-teacher conferences, homework notebooks that parents must sign, and newsletters. In addition, home visits are routine in Japan and Denmark. Canada has introduced modern technology into the communication process whereby schools publish an electronic newsletter and web page that can be read by parents and community members.

According to the OECD, increasing competition and globalization in economic relationships is requiring that students be educated to function in a rapidly changing environment. The rapidity of change affects not only school children, but also parents themselves. Economic competition is requiring that individuals of all ages become life-long learners. The report states that governments in many of the surveyed countries feel that partnerships will provide a convenient opportunity for adults to attend classes in the evening at local school buildings. This allows learning centers to experience economies of scale while aiding the current workforce in developing human capital. Further, the OECD report suggests that there are positive spillovers, especially for disadvantaged families, when parents or guardians are attending the school in the evenings. Obviously, the community as a whole benefits due to an increasing general skill level, but children also see that learning is important to their parents and thus take their own studies more seriously.

A challenge to the educational process in many OECD countries is an increasing heterogeneity of the population. According to the report, the wide diversity of ethnicity, culture and social class is creating an environment in which educational goals and objectives are more difficult to define. The United States, France, and due to reunification, Germany have experienced a considerable increase in the diversity of their student populations in the past twenty years. This has, to some extent, increased the difficulty in maintaining fluent lines of communication and establishing educational objectives. The OECD found that some schools are beginning to develop parental mentoring programs to address this communication problem.

Partnership initiatives are not, however, without critics. The OECD found that teacher unions and, in some countries (e.g., Ireland), the church are opposed to giving increased authority to parents. Particularly disturbing to these actors is the increasing level of legal parental involvement in school governance and curriculum design. According to the report, many teachers are concerned that education is being deprofessionalized and that their careers are subject to the whims of parents. Teachers and administrators also feel uneasy about parents visiting the classroom. Also disturbing is the finding that parent participation in education partnerships is primarily limited to affluent and well-educated parents. Given an increasingly diverse student population, there