Social Competencies and Expectations Regarding the Impending Transition to Secondary School

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Abstract

Changing from elementary to secondary school is a life event that every child has to pass. Previous research has shown that some children feel more threatened by the transition than others. In the present study children's expectations concerning the impending transition to secondary school were analyzed and it was investigated how individual levels of social competencies, aggressive behavior, peer-acceptance and victimization experiences are related to the expectations regarding the transition to secondary school. The results demonstrated that empathy and aggression are strongly related to the perception of the impending transition as challenge whereas victimization and peer-acceptance were related to the perception of the transition as threat. Furthermore, with the help of a cluster analysis, four groups of children showing different patterns of expectations were identified. The findings give valuable information about children's perceptions of the impending school transition. It is discussed how teachers could support children to cope better with transition processes.

Keywords: expectations, school transition, secondary school, elementary school, challenge.

Competencias y Expectativas Sociales en Relación con la Inminente Transición a la Escuela Secundaria

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Resumen

El cambio de la escuela primaria a la secundaria es un acontecimiento de la vida que todo niño tiene que pasar. Investigaciones anteriores han demostrado que algunos niños se sienten más amenazados por la transición que otros. En el presente estudio se analizaron las expectativas de los niños en relación con la inminente transición a la escuela secundaria y se investigó cómo los niveles individuales de competencias sociales, el comportamiento agresivo, la aceptación de los compañeros y las experiencias de victimización se relacionan con las expectativas relativas a la transición a la escuela secundaria. Los resultados demostraron que la empatía y la agresión están fuertemente relacionadas con la percepción de la transición inminente como un desafío, mientras que la victimización y la aceptación de los compañeros estaban relacionadas con la percepción de la transición como una amenaza. Además, con la ayuda de un análisis por conglomerados, se identificaron cuatro grupos de niños que mostraban diferentes pautas de expectativas. Las conclusiones ofrecen información valiosa sobre las percepciones de los niños acerca de la inminente transición escolar. Se examina cómo los maestros podrían apoyar a los niños para afrontar mejor los procesos de transición.

Palabras clave: expectativas, transición escolar, escuela secundaria, escuela primaria, desafío.

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Major developmental tasks in late childhood include the development of social skills, academic skills and the formation of social relationships with peers (Havighurst, 1956). Especially social skills are of high relevance for the school context, as previous research has shown that social skills are strongly connected with interpersonal interaction (Jurkowski, 2011) and with better academic achievement (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Therefore, it can be argued that on the one hand, the school context offers opportunities to develop those abilities and on the other hand the school context demands those abilities for a successful participation in school life. Elias et al. (2007) argued that personal bonds influence the learning in schools. It might thus be hypothesized that the educational process is influenced by relationships with peers and teachers and emotional and social relatedness (Durlak et al., 2007). These relationships usually persist for longer time periods. However, at the end of elementary school significant changes in relational structures take place due to the transition from elementary to secondary school (Sirsch, 2003).

From previous research it is well known that the transition to a secondary school can be perceived as a severe threat or a big challenge (Sirsch, 2003). The term threat describes the perception of the impending transition as negative and is associated with fear. Perceiving the transition as a challenge has a more positive focus. Children may show feelings of excitement and joy and look forward to the new situation. Perceiving a transition as challenge however does not automatically mean that it is not perceived as a threat. Instead, both expectations can be described as independent rather than as two ends of one continuum (Sirsch, 2003). Neuenschwander, Rösselet, Niederbacher and Rottermann (2018) recently demonstrated the school transitions do also impact the academic self-concept of students. The academic self-concept of students who made a transition experience was strongly influenced by the new reference group. Further evidence for the importance of analyzing school transitions can be found in Vierhaus, Domsch and Lohaus (2018). The authors argued that most students cope successful with the transition experience. However, they

also mentioned that it is important to consider variables that might influence the transition experience.

As the transition from primary to secondary school is an experience that every child makes, the present study focused on fourth graders' expectations concerning the impending transition to secondary school in Hesse (Germany). Fourth graders were chosen, because the transition from primary to secondary school in Hesse takes place after the fourth grade. In addition, the present study sought to examine the relation of transition experiences with social competencies, problem behavior and relatedness (peer-acceptance and victimization). It can be assumed that social competencies might function as a buffer of the stress that a school transition process can cause for children according to Dubow and Tisak (1989) who described that children who had better social problem-solving skills showed fewer behavior problems and achieved better grades after stressful life-events. These findings indicate a stress buffering effect of social competencies. This is of central relevance for the present study, even though Dubow and Tisak (1989) did not directly assess school transition processes as a stressor. It can be argued that comparable effects might be found with respect to school transition (Ball, Lohaus, & Miebach, 2006).

Further evidence that periods of transition can be experienced as stressful life events that affect current and future psychological adjustment and well-being was presented by Rice, Frederickson, and Seymour (2011). Due to the severe consequences that stressful life events can have on the future development it is important to investigate how children perceive school transitions and which factors influence these perceptions, as it can be assumed that not all children feel the same about the transition.

In previous studies it could be demonstrated that some children cope better with stressful situations than others (Noeker & Petermann, 2008). Social competencies might function as factors facilitating the handling of stressful life events while negative interactions in the classroom might function as risk. This idea is based on studies that identified characteristics that are related to a poor transition (Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm, & Splittgerber, 2000; Rice et al., 2011). Higher levels of social competencies and good interactions with peers were predictors of a more successful school transition process. One specific expression of a lack social competencies is aggressive behavior, which is associated with a less successful school

transition. Berndt and Mekos (1995) showed that adolescents who engaged in more misconduct adjusted less positively after the transition to secondary school (junior high-school) although they previously had positive expectations. This result can be interpreted as evidence that behavior problems influence the coping with stressful life-events. Even though the reported studies investigated the transition process itself and its correlates, it might be assumed that similar effects and correlations would be found for children's expectations regarding the transition. In detail, this illustrates that social competencies and positive peer relations are important for the school transition.

According to Lord, Eccles, and McCarthy (1994), positive self-concepts in both academic and social domains can also facilitate school transitions. The assumption that peer-acceptance and sociometric status would influence later school adjustment was also supported by Wentzel (2003). Furthermore, positive correlations between social relatedness in school and children's quality of life after school transition could be found (Gillison, Standage, & Skevington, 2008). These findings indicate a connection between social variables and school transitions processes. However, there is little research regarding the expectations of children regarding the transition, but there are studies indicating that peer problems are related to children's concerns about school before as well as after school transition (Rice et al., 2011). For that reason, it can be assumed that children's expectations about transitions are related to social competences and experiences as well. Many studies reported gender differences for empathy and aggression. These studies indicated that girls have higher levels of empathy whereas boys show higher levels of aggression (Garaigordobil, 2009; Scheithauer, 2003). Therefore, the analysis of gender differences can be important with respect to expectations of an impending school transition as well.

School transition in Germany

In some federal states in Germany (e.g., Hesse), the transition from primary to secondary school takes place after fourth grade when children are about 10 to 11 years old. The German school system offers the opportunity to visit one out of three types of schools after the elementary school. The school type is chosen according to the academic and cognitive abilities that children

have. Usually teachers make the decision which school seems suitable for each child based on their judgment of the children's abilities. Due to the structure in the German educational system the children do not stay in their well-known classes and with their well-known teachers. Instead, the children have to adjust to a new classroom and to a new school after the transition, which includes new teachers and new classmates as well.

Goals of the Present Study

The major goal of the present study was to assess the relations between individual levels of social competencies and students' expectations of the impending transition from primary to secondary school. These expectations reflect children's perceptions of the impending stressful life-event. As has already been outlined by Sirsch (2003) personal and environmental antecedents as well as situational variables might shape children's perceptions. In this study empathy, aggression, and emotion regulation were chosen as personal antecedents that could exert influences on the perceptions. It was expected that higher levels of empathy and emotion regulation abilities would be related to more positive and less threatening expectations of the impending transition. For aggression it was hypothesized that children showing higher levels of aggressive behavior would perceive the impending transition as more challenging, but not more threatening (Berndt & Mekos, 1995). Previous research has mainly used a correlational approach to analyze relations and predictors of expectations to transition processes. The present study also uses this approach, but moreover it adds a cluster analysis to get better insights in the role that social competencies have in the perception of transition processes. In the cluster analysis it should be analyzed if there are certain groups of children sharing comparable patterns of expectations. This could be helpful for teachers who support children before the transition. Moreover, it was in the research focus to outline how these groups of children differ with respect to personal antecedents and situational variables.

Beside the influence of personal antecedents on the expectations of the school transition it was investigated what influence victimization and peer-acceptance as situational variables would have. It was expected that higher levels of peer-acceptance and lower levels of victimization would be related to more positive expectations.

Method

Participants

For the present study data from 144 children (71 boys and 73 girls). The mean age of the children was 9.68 years (SD = 0.54 years). All children were attending a fourth grade of a primary school in Hesse. The data collection was realized during the second term of the fourth grade. The participating schools were located in urban areas with mostly middle-class families. Approximately 84% of the children participating in the study were German without a migration background. The 16% of children with a migration background also spoke German fluently. The contact to children and their families was realized with the help of the schools, after the necessary applications had been made (Ministry of Education and the Arts and Supervisory School Authority, respectively). For all children, written active informed consent was obtained from their parents and assent from the children themselves. The children received small presents as a compensation for their efforts.

Material

To assess the constructs of interest questionnaires were handed out to the children and their teachers.

Empathy. We used the empathy scale from the IVE (Inventory to assess empathy, impulsivity, and risky behaviors) for 9- to 14-year-old children (Stadler, Janke, & Schmeck, 2004). The scale has 16 items that have to be answered with 1 (*yes*) or 0 (*no*) by the children (Cronbach's α = .84). A sample item reads: "I get sad when one of my friends is unhappy."

Anger regulation strategies. We asked the children to complete 14 items (Cronbach's α = .88) taken from the Feel-KJ measuring adaptive anger regulation strategies (Grob & Smolenski, 2005). This scale had to be answered on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*nearly never*) to 5 (*nearly always*). A sample items reads: "When I am angry I tell myself that it's not so bad."

Aggression. To assess the level of aggressiveness of children the scale developed by Little, Jones, Henrich, and Hawley (2003) was used. This scale measured direct and indirect aggression via a self-report and it allows distinguishing between reactive and instrumental forms of

aggression. Altogether the scale consisted of 12 items, measuring pure overt aggression (e.g., "I'm the kind of person who often fights with others"; α = .86) and pure relational aggression (e.g., "I'm the kind of person who tells my friends to stop liking someone"; α = .77). The children in the present study rated how true each item was for them on a 4-point scale from 1 (*not at all true*) to 4 (*completely true*).

Peer-acceptance. To measure peer-acceptance a scale from the German version of the Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC-D; Asendorpf and van Aken, 1993) was chosen. The items contain a description of two groups of children that have certain features. The child that is surveyed has to decide which children have characteristics that are comparable to own characteristics. In a next step the child has to decide whether they are very similar or only a little bit similar. A sample item reads "Some children have many friends. Other children don't have many friends". The internal consistencies for the scale was α = .72.

Victimization. Victimization was assessed with the German Bullying and Victimization Questionnaire for Children (BVF-K; von Marées & Petermann, 2009). This instrument is a self-report questionnaire for children between 4 and 12 years of age. For the present study eight items assessing victimization experiences were used. The items had to be answered on a 3-point scale ranging from 0 (*never*), 1 (*sometimes*) to 2 (*often*). The victimization scale consists of two subscales assessing direct victimization (e.g., "How often do other children purposely hurt you?") and indirect victimization (e.g., "How often do other children keep you from playing along?"). The internal consistencies for the scales were α = .80 for direct victimization and α = .73 for indirect victimization.

Achievement self-ratings. To assess pupils' perceived academic achievement the children were asked to indicate on a 4-point scale if they regarded their achievement in math, German, and social studies as 1 (*very weak*), 2 (*below-average*), 3 (*average*) or 4 (*above-average*).

Expectations concerning the impending transition from primary to secondary school. In order to assess the expectations regarding the impending transition to secondary school the children completed the Impending Transition to Secondary School Perceived as Challenge or Threat questionnaire (ITCT; Sirsch, 2003). This measure comprises 28 items that belong to four scales and assesses the perception of the impending transition

as academic or social threat or academic or social challenge. The items had to be answered on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*I strongly disagree*) to 4 (*I strongly agree*). The internal consistencies for the scales ranged from $\alpha = .87$ to $\alpha = .92$. Items were introduced by the sentence "When I think of the fact that I will go to a new school next year then I …" and read like "… look forward to it, because I can show what I have learnt" (academic challenge), "… look forward to it, because I may get nice classmates" (social challenge), "… worry since I may not be smart enough" (academic threat), or "… worry since I may not find nice friends" (social threat).

Procedure
All children filled in the questionnaires during regular school lessons in a group setting. During the data collection a research assistant was present to give instructions and to answer questions that the children had. As the data collection took place in the framework of a larger study, the children were additionally required to answer other measures that are not relevant for the present contribution. After the completion of the study the families and the teachers received a general feedback about the results of the study.

Results

Descriptive statistics
In a first step of the analysis the items that belonged to one scale were summed up and means and standard deviations for each scale were computed. The descriptive statistics are given in Table 1. In the introductory section it has already been outlined that other researchers found gender differences with respect to aggression and empathy. Therefore, the data of the present study were checked for gender differences with the help of *t*-Tests for independent samples. The results can be found in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics for the scales used in the study (N =144)

Scale	Sample		Boys		Girls		*t(142)*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	
Child Reports							
Empathy	11.60	3.62	10.11	3.88	13.05	2.67	-5.32**
Direct aggression	7.72	2.56	8.51	3.13	6.96	1.50	3.80**
Indirect aggression	7.70	2.30	8.03	2.50	7.38	2.06	1.69*
Anger regulation	45.71	11.08	44.72	11.91	46.67	11.91	-1.06
Peer-acceptance	17.37	4.02	17.70	3.79	17.04	4.23	<1
Direct victimization	6.13	2.03	5.76	1.85	6.48	2.15	-2.15
Indirect victimization	5.30	1.71	4.97	1.51	5.62	1.84	-2.30
ICTC academic challenge	24.38	5.35	22.87	5.58	25.85	4.70	-3.47[#]
ICTC social challenge	18.85	3.81	17.62	4.10	20.04	3.10	-4.01[#]
ICTC academic threat	16.33	5.66	16.31	5.83	16.36	5.53	<1
ICTC social threat	11.78	4.14	11.61	3.81	11.96	4.46	<1

*Notes. *p < .05, **p < .01.*

The analyses showed that boys and girls differed. Girls showed higher values in empathy than boys and boys reported higher values in aggression than girls. With respect to the expectations regarding the impending school transition there was a marginally significant effect for academic and social challenge. Girls reported higher values on these scales than boys.

There were no correlations found between children's perception of transition as academic challenge and academic threat ($r = -.07$, $p = .43$) or social challenge and social threat ($r = -.06$, $p = .46$), respectively. Seeing the transition as a challenge, however, was highly correlated between the

academic and social domain ($r = .75$, $p < .01$). Similarly, the perception as an academic threat and as a social threat was positively correlated ($r = .80$, $p < .01$).

Correlations of the expectations with social competencies and self-ratings of academic achievement yielded some interesting results (Table 2). First, there is no correlation between academic achievement self-ratings and any of the transition expectation scales (all $ps > .07$). Peer-acceptance, direct, and indirect victimization seem to correlate with the perception of the transition as a threat, whereas empathy, anger regulation, direct, and indirect aggression are associated with the perception of the transition as a challenge.

Table 2
Correlations between expectations and social competencies

	Academic challenge	Social challenge	Academic threat	Social threat
Peer-acceptance	-.03	-.02	**-.22****	**-.29****
Direct victimization	.04	.07	**.17***	**.25****
Indirect victimization	.03	.10	**.23****	**.30****
Empathy	**.38****	**.36****	.01	.02
Anger regulation	**.28****	**.23****	.01	.02
Direct aggression	**-.40****	**-.42****	.07	.04
Indirect aggression	**-.24****	**-.16#**	.08	.03
Acad. self-concept German	-.04	.04	-.15#	-.08
Acad. self-concept science	.14#	.15#	-.02	-.03
Acad. self-concept math	-.02	-.09	-.03	-.04

Note. # $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Clusters of children according to their ITCT answers. The correlation analyses demonstrated that the expectations regarding the impending transition to secondary school were related to social competencies rather than academic achievement self-rating. In a next step of the analysis it was therefore decided to analyze if there would be groups of children showing comparable patterns of their expectations of the transition. In order to determine the prototypes of expectations toward the impending transition, a hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's procedure (squared Euclidian distances between subjects) was performed on the ITCT data. A four-cluster solution will be presented because the other solutions that were considered (two, three, and five clusters) did not add further information or were not clearly interpretable. The four emerging clusters can clearly be described by their values on each of the ITCT scales. The values are given in standardized z-scores in Figure 1.
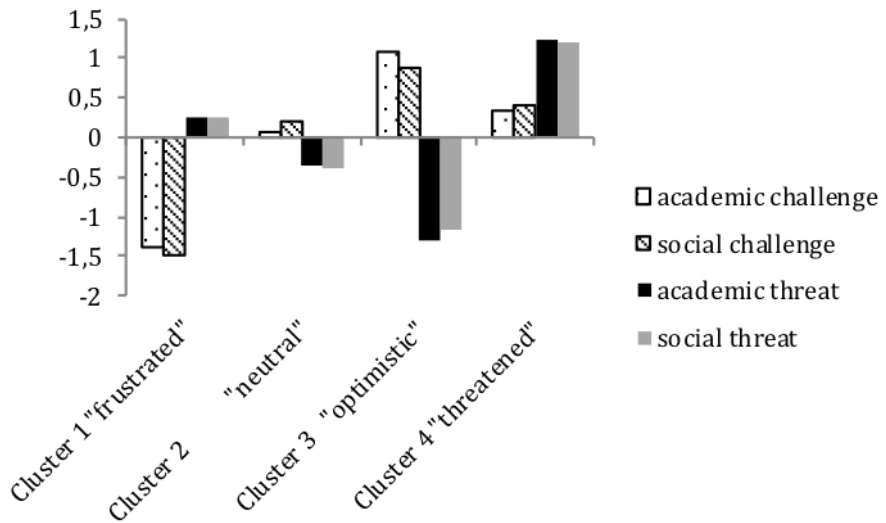

Figure 1. Clusters for children's expectations regarding the impending transition to secondary school

The first cluster was characterized by negative values in expected academic and social challenge and low values in academic and social threat. Therefore, this cluster includes children who seem to be a bit frustrated by school. These children ($N = 28$) do definitely not see any challenge and positive aspects in the school transition, but at the same time they are unimpressed by potential threats. The next cluster can be described as neutral. Children falling in this cluster ($N = 53$) are unimpressed by the impending transition. These children feel neither particularly challenged nor threatened. To the contrary, the children in the third cluster seem to be moderately challenged and they definitely do not experience any threat by the impending transition. Therefore, this cluster might be termed the optimistic one ($N = 20$). Finally, the fourth cluster was characterized by high values in academic and social threat and moderate values in academic and social challenge. Therefore, the children who fell in this cluster seem to experience a severe threat by the impending transition ($N = 30$). All four clusters contained a comparable number of children, and the patterns of challenge and threat experiences could be well interpreted. There were 13 children who could not be included in the clustering process due to missing values.

After the cluster solution was found, it was decided to compare the levels of social competencies that the children of the four groups had with the help of analyses of variance. In the ANOVAs the cluster affiliation was used as between subject factor, the means for the different groups can be found in Table 3.

Table 3
Descriptive values for social competencies in the four expectation clusters

Scale	Cluster 1 "frustrated"		Cluster 2 "neutral"		Cluster 3 "optimistic"		Cluster 4 "threatened"	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Empathy	9.11	4.43	12.25	3.28	12.65	2.13	11.90	3.52
Direct aggression	9.50	3.71	7.36	1.68	6.25	0.72	7.90	2.95
Indirect aggression	8.39	2.91	7.40	1.78	7.10	2.20	7.97	2.57
Anger regulation	41.68	11.68	46.55	10.03	49.10	15.70	46.97	8.01
Peer-acceptance	17.04	3.50	18.13	3.55	18.05	3.86	15.43	4.71
Direct victimization	6.04	1.90	6.19	1.81	5.15	1.84	6.57	2.37
Indirect victimization	5.25	1.35	5.17	1.64	4.70	1.17	6.07	2.30

The ANOVA with empathy as dependent variable revealed a significant effect for the factor Affiliation to a certain cluster, $F(3, 131) = 6.09$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = 0.13$. Pairwise comparisons clarified that children who belonged to the group of pupils who seemed to be a bit frustrated with regard to the impending transition had the lowest values on empathy. They differed from all three other groups ($ps < .01$). The children in the other three groups did not differ in their empathy values. In the next ANOVA the differences in the level of adaptive anger regulation strategies were analyzed. It got obvious that the children of the four groups did not differ in their levels of anger regulation, $F(3, 131) = 2.08$, $p = .11$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$. With respect to direct aggression significant differences were found between the groups, $F(3, 131) = 7.56$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = 0.15$. The children who seemed to be frustrated by school had the highest values in direct aggression and their aggression scores were significantly higher than the ones in the other three groups (all $ps < .01$). The pattern of results that could be found for indirect aggression was different. No group differences could be demonstrated, $F(3, 131) = 1.73$, $p = .16$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$. The next ANOVA analyzed the differences for peer-acceptance. For this dependent variable a significant differences could be found, $F(3, 131) = 3.41$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = 0.08$. Children who perceived the transition as a threat had significantly lower values than children who were

neutral or optimistic about the transition. Finally, the differences for indirect and direct victimization experiences were checked. With respect to direct victimization no differences between the four groups could be found, $F(3, 131) = 2.15$, $p = .10$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$. Different results could be identified with respect to indirect victimization, $F(3, 131) = 2.96$, $p = .04$, $\eta^2 = 0.07$. The children who reported to be threatened by the impending school transition were the ones with the highest values in direct victimization (all $ps \leq .07$). The children in the other three groups did not differ in their direct victimization values (all $ps > .05$).

Discussion

The present study investigated children's expectations regarding the impending transition from elementary to secondary school. It was expected that the individual level of social competencies as well as aggression and the level of victimization experiences or peer-acceptance would be related to the transition expectations.

All in all, children showed higher levels of perceiving the impending transition as a challenge than as a threat. This finding is encouraging, because it demonstrates that children have a rather positive attitude about their transition to a new school. In our sample, children had relatively high levels of empathy and peer-acceptance, and very low levels of direct and indirect aggression. Gender differences were as expected, showing that girls reported more empathy and less direct aggression than boys. Interestingly, girls tended to perceive the impending transition more as an academic and social challenge than boys. There were no gender differences in the perception of the impending transition as a threat.

An especially interesting result was the pattern of correlations between social variables and transition expectations. It could be demonstrated that constructs that reflect one's own behavior towards others (empathy, anger regulation and both direct and indirect aggression) are correlated with expectations as challenge. Children with higher levels of empathy and anger regulation skills, and lower levels of direct and indirect aggression, tended to perceive the impending transition as a challenge. The four constructs did not correlate with the perception of the transition as a threat, though.

In contrast, those constructs that merely reflect how children are treated by others (peer-acceptance, direct, and indirect victimization) are correlated with perceiving the transition as a threat, but not with perceiving the transition as a challenge.

All in all these social variables have a higher relation to transition expectations than children's self-ratings of academic achievement. This further emphasizes the importance of a positive class climate and good peer relations. These findings can be of importance for teachers who educate children before their school transition. If teachers want their students to look positively forward to the impending transition, they should not only teach individual social competencies and academic skills, but they should also try to establish a positive classroom climate by means of classroom management.

A further result of the present study is the identification of four groups of children who perceive the impending transition in different ways. These four groups can be described as frustrated, neutral, optimistic, and threatened. Low levels of challenge and average levels of threat perception classified children who belonged to the group of frustrated children. These children do not seem to experience joy when imagining the transition to a new school. However, they also do not perceive the transition as threatening. The second group (neutrals) consisted of children with average levels of challenge and average levels of threat perceptions. It seems as if those children neither experience much of a challenge nor high levels of joy when changing their schools. The third group had a more positive attitude towards the transition. Those children had high levels of perceived challenge and average levels of perceived threat. Finally, the fourth group consisted of children who reported to feel highly threatened by the impending transition and experienced average levels of challenge.

Those four groups did not only differ with regard to their perception of the transition as challenge or threat but also in their social competencies, their levels of aggression, peer-acceptance, and victimization. Especially the group of frustrated children showed lower levels of empathy and higher levels of direct and indirect aggression. Children of the "threatened" group were significantly more directly and indirectly victimized. The differences in individual competencies and situational variables between the four groups highlight the necessity of individually tailored offers in the accompaniment

before a school transition. Of course, it will be difficult for teachers to satisfy every individual student's requirements. What teachers can achieve, however, is to create a classroom environment that fosters positive peer relations and individual social competencies (Eichhorn, 2012). Moreover, the requirements of four groups of children are easier to meet than lots of individual needs. Thus, the finding that students can be divided into four groups according to their expectations of the impending school transition can be of high practical relevance.

Nevertheless, the present study suffers some limitations. First of all, it was not investigated how expectations are related to actual transition experiences. This would be especially important, as it would clarify how victimized students develop after the transition. A second aspect concerns the self-rating of academic achievement, which was not validated by grades. Therefore, no clear conclusion can be drawn according to the predictive validity of grades for the perception of the impending school transition. However, as known from self-concept research, the subjective perception of one's abilities can have a great impact on interests and achievement (Marsh, Trautwein, Lüdtke, Köller, & Baumert, 2005). Especially in a context of expectations it was therefore chosen to focus on children's self-ratings of academic achievement rather on their actual grades.

To sum up, the results of the present study give valuable insights in children's expectations concerning school transition. It could be demonstrated that social competencies, aggression, victimization experiences and peer acceptance have a noticeable impact on the perception of the transition as a challenge or a threat. With respect to these two dimensions it has to be distinguished between positive and negative perceptions of the transition. It cannot be said that the perception of the transition as threat or challenge represents two endpoints of one dimension but rather, they are two independent dimensions that can occur separately or in combination. This is also confirmed by the fact that both dimensions correlate with different social competencies and experiences. However, children did not differentiate between academic and social challenge or academic and social threat, respectively. This indicates that perceiving a school transition as threat or challenge does not depend on the specific domain and can be regarded as stable. It should be important, though, to support children in facing a new school with a positive attitude as research

shows that self-fulfilling prophecies about social rejection can affect social behavior and acceptance (Stinson, Logel, Shepherd, & Zanna, 2011). This means that children who expect to make negative experiences at their new school might unintentionally induce these experiences. Helping children to perceive the new school as a challenge or a chance should therefore be an important task for primary school teachers.

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