

## Easing the transition from kindergarten to primary school

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### Abstract

The transition from kindergarten to primary school is widely recognized as a crucial turning point in a child's life. Going through this dynamic process creates the foundation of a child's development in the subsequent years. Children may experience this transition in two different ways: there is the group of children who has a strong desire towards this new journey and the other group who encounters fear and anxiety. Therefore, adapting to change is a major challenge that children face during this period. However, the engagement of all relevant stakeholders can make this process easier. Nevertheless, there is a lack of communication and proper collaboration between these parties. That is why this paper is focused on strategies and best practices that enable a smooth and successful transition.

**Keywords:** Transition, kindergarten, primary school.

### Introduction

Often, kindergarten years are not seen as a preparation for primary school. However, they serve as a support for the development of competences in children that at the same time are relevant in the school environment. Autonomy is one of the basic competences that a child must develop and it can consist of the following activities: being able to dress on their own, request permission to go to the toilet, or being able to eat on their own in the lunch break. Independence in self-care tasks performed at school is crucial. Moreover, during their stay in kindergarten children should become familiar with books, holding them in their hands, and explaining some of the images that they see.

Furthermore, school readiness is an important concept in this topic and it can be defined by three dimensions: readiness of the child itself, readiness of the school they will be attending and readiness of the child's family (Britto & Limlingan, 2012). Young children need help to achieve their full potential. That is why they should be encouraged to develop and learn since the beginning of the school period. On the other hand, school's readiness is expressed by the ways they foster the transition of the children and their families into this new experience. This can be assessed in the following areas: safe and conducive school premises, use of resources in creating appropriate classrooms, and encouragement of children participation and interaction in supplementary activities (Britto & Limlingan, 2012). It is important that schools should be able to meet the needs of each unique child and to operate in their best interest by embracing child-centered methodologies. There is also a list of must have school learning facilities that can make the process much easier, such as playgrounds

and libraries (n.d, 2020).

However, school readiness does not only refer to the physical environment but also to the psychological environment as well. A child must develop a sense of belonging and well-being in order to succeed (Broström, 2018). Emotionally preparing the child prior to the beginning of the primary school can be really tiring, but also rewarding (McFarlane, n.d.). Children should be aware of what happens within the school environment. Thus, it is important to conduct small talks with children where you describe some of the most common activities that take place in school. In this way, they will build familiarity with the new environment. Nevertheless, there may be cases when the child demonstrates a negative attitude. When this happens, a positive talk should take place by carefully managing their emotions. Support from parents, relatives and community is among the several elements that helps a child in the psychological and social aspects of a new experience. After that comes the academic aspect.

### **Play-based curriculum**

As mentioned, in kindergarten children can be introduced to what school will be like. However, learning activities can be conducted by taking into consideration that the traditional schooling methods of directly sharing knowledge, like math problems, are not the most suitable solution. Instead, what can be implemented is a play-based curriculum where academic knowledge is achieved through play (Broström, 2018). A play-based curriculum can be introduced in kindergartens as a great solution of the transition process as it pays close attention to the necessity of play among children by incorporating at the same time intentional learning.

Play, often seen as an activity of just spending time, is much more valuable as it does not only acquire physical skills but also social skills (Britto & Limlingan, 2012). Educational games help with hand-eye coordination and memorizing. Charades and puzzles are the most common games performed in kindergartens (Daghistani, 2011). While playing, children learn how to use gestures, they improve their language skills and master the use of surrounding objects. A play world can be initiated by the teacher also through a shared book reading. In such case, the child would be given the opportunity to choose roles, to dress up and to act. Dialogue is a key element of language development and listening skills.

## **Best practices**

### **Best practices in Denmark**

Several adaptation programs are designed to aid children in taking the next step in their education path. In the Danish welfare system education is one of the key priorities (Statista, 2021). Therefore, the best practices used in different Danish municipalities are introduced in this paper. Denmark works on two split systems, each with their respective legislation: (1) the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector and (2) the primary and lower secondary system (The Ministry for Children and Social Affairs, 2017).

ECEC consists of two categories of children: nurseries, which include children from 1.5 to 3 years old and kindergartens that include children from 3 to 5 years old.

The ECEC system which is adopted by the Greve municipality focuses on constant collaboration between kindergarten staff and primary school teachers. As part of the collaboration program, the educators exchange visits for a couple of days to better understand each other's work practices and responsibilities. On the other hand, the Skive municipality has introduced a new program where tasks are divided into 'must-do' and 'can-do'. The 'must-do' tasks are performed by ECEC staff, parents, as well as primary school teachers. Continuous conversations and gatherings take place to ensure that the children go through a development journey. Another important task of this program is that children visit the school premises prior to the start date in order to become familiar with the environment and express all their concerns and fears. While 'can-do' tasks concern the child potential and social skills.

Moreover, to facilitate the transition process the Holbæk and Ringsted municipalities have come up with a system where a group of specific pedagogues are hired to follow the children from kindergarten to primary school by ensuring that they feel confident throughout the process. Basically, these pedagogues (*samtænkende pædagoger* in Danish) stay in the kindergarten during the spring months and then continue their work in the primary school during the fall semester. Due to being professionals in the field of education, the rate of a successful transition increases.

### **Best practices in Slovenia**

In addition, the topic of children development in the field of education is seen as a main concern by governments (Vidmar, Leban, & Rutar, 2017). It is extensively argued that both kindergartens and schools should include counselling services provided by professional consultants. These professionals could be psychologists, teachers or social workers. They manage to plan and participate in several meetings with parents by taking care of the transition process in details.

For these reasons, in Slovenia, there are 2 teachers present in the first year of school (Vidmar, Leban, & Rutar, 2017). One is a primary education teacher and the second one, in most of the cases, is a preschool teacher. The logic behind such decision is to aid the children by making the transition process less stressful.

Furthermore, it should be highlighted that the Kindergarten Curriculum and the Basic School Program in Slovenia hold a similar theoretical framework (Peterka, et al., 2016). The teacher role is to be able to create an environment where children are stimulated to learn and show creativity. The primary used approach is to let pupils work in groups. As known, a kindergarten curriculum is flexible. That is why in Slovenian schools employ the concept of full activity days separated into four categories: cultural, science, sports and technical days (n.d, 2019). Pupils visit environments that develop their experimentation skills and learning, such as a short trip at the ZOO or botanical garden.

### **In conclusion**

A successful transition process helps the child to create confidence in managing the future changes in their life. Hence, more attention should be paid to the implementation of transition programs in practice, especially in developing countries where the level of the educational system is not as high as in developed countries.

Joint effort should be made by kindergartens, primary schools, children and their families. Kindergarten educators should be able to communicate with the children and identify their expectations for the primary school. Educators together with parents can jointly understand the communication skills of a child. After this phase, contact and collaboration of these parties and primary school teachers should take place in order to create a careful plan. The skills learned in kindergarten should be exploited in the new experience they have ahead.

All in all, a transition marks a new stage for the child, so it is a huge process that should ensure optimal development of each individual. Children should be supplied with real-life situations and problems in order to learn how to take decisions. Moreover, the learning process occurs while interacting with other peers in a collaborative environment. In the end, the more knowledge and practice a child holds the more eager they are when embarking on a new experience.

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