



FOCUS GROUPS REPORT



CARE2LEARN

Supporting the Transition from Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary School

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CARE2LEARN

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EXPERT GROUP REPORT

Focus groups with experts were conducted live in kindergarten and elementary school with six respondents (one preschool teacher, kindergarten pedagogue, kindergarten psychologist and three classroom teachers).

1. What do you think contributes to a smooth transition for children from pre-school to primary school?

Classroom teachers agreed that it is very important that a child knows where is he/she going and what are school expectations. Basic knowledge about the physical environment and structure of the school process can facilitate the transition. Their experience is that the best adaptation to school system have children who understand their (school's) expectations and those who know how to react to those expectations; verbal ones, but also those who were not pronounced but children still react to them properly. They also pointed out that well developed social skills help children during transition because their class group can help in adjusting to a new environment.

Preschool experts report that children's independence (taking care of their own things, dressing up, eating, using toilet etc.) and emotional stability are the most important „helpers“ in the transition process. Experts also mentioned intensive collaboration between preschool educational system and school system. This collaboration can be accomplished by preschool children visiting schools but also by school children visiting kindergartens. Other forms of collaboration include sharing information about children between kindergarten and school (between teachers, but also between psychologists, pedagogists, special needs therapists etc.)

Preschool experts believe that graphomotor and academic skills (voice analysis and synthesis, early mathematic skills) can ease the transition. They report that digital competencies are those that are often neglected in kindergarten; they think that it is not very important for children to know how to use a keyboard and a mouse, because they will learn that very fast on their own, but they think that developing self-protective behaviors related to virtual surroundings should be supported.



They all agree that preparation for a smooth transition is needed and it is usually incorporated in the early and preschool educational system and that adults (parents and preschool teachers) have the responsibility to present school to a child; not only through informations, but through their positive approach and attitudes.

2. Which competences of children do you believe are the most important for the successful transition of children from ECEC to primary school?

Experts agree that independence is a very important competence; that means that children should know how to take care of themselves, express their opinions, take care of their possessions because that is something that no one else will do it for them. Both preschool and classroom teachers emphasized emotional maturity as a very important competence for successful transition. By emotional maturity they consider dealing effectively with one's emotions, standing up for themselves, standing out when needed, finding compromise, dealing with frustrations, fulfill expectations, endure failure, assertiveness, persistence and empathy. They all also pointed out verbal expression in terms of being able to express one's own opinion in complete sentences, understanding others and storyteeling (noticing the key elements of the story, summing up and being able to discuss after hearing the story).

Preschool experts also mentioned civil and social competences as very important; that means that children should know how to stand up for themselves and verbally express instead of involving in physical violence. As expert from kindergarten know, parents rarely decide on civil education in schools.

a. Do you notice the lack of specific skills in children (that you previously specified) for this transition?

Experts agree that disproportion between children's intellectual and socio-emotional development is huge. Most of first graders know how to count, write, sort etc., but they lack independence, accepting differences and critical thinking. Experts feel that there is too much done for them by their parents (what should be done by children) and that they are not ready



for school, in socio-emotional area of development, as they should be according to their age. Experts agree that some children do not respect other's boundaries and do not comprehend other's needs and rights; they perceive only themselves. Some children in kindergarten still have troubles when separating from their parents and this generates problems in their social relations. Parents of those children are overprotective and do not encourage maturation (for example, they force specific friendships and that makes children unsecure when a specific friend is not in kindergarten until the point where a 6-year old child does not want to stay in kindergarten if his/her friend is not present).

Preschool teachers notice that children have low levels of concentration; they especially have problems focusing on and hearing each other.

A lot of children have poor verbal competencies; most of them have troubles in expressing themselves, without crying and frustrating. Their verbal expressions are very much simplified and shortened, often limited to YES or NO. Accordingly, they have troubles with voice syntactic and analysis.

It has to be said that not all skills have to be developed in order for a child to be ready for school. For example, one classroom teacher said that a girl in her class does not know how to tie her shoelaces but this is not a problem for her because she asks for help her classmates or a teacher and this is how she compensates the lack of this independence skill.



3. What do you think the current ECEC system is lacking for preparing the children for this transition?

Preschool experts agree that the system is lacking some kind of more strict instrument that should make the parents take care of their children. Sometimes they are not aware that their child is missing some competences and as much as preschool teachers and other experts are trying to explain that they do not face those problems. They often say that „it is not a big deal“ or that „it is a phase“ and expect that it will pass when a child enters school. Experts feel frustrated and sorry for those children because they think children could do better and progress if their parents would take care of them properly. PTA meetings and workshops attend those who want it; those who need their support the most often do not attend. Some children even do not attend preschool although it is mandatory (250 hours minimum). That should be reported to Centre for social care but it is rarely done.

Preschool experts agree that smaller groups would enable individualized approach to every child. It is very hard to dedicate to every child when having so much children in one group.

All experts agree that cooperation between different sectors would help transition, especially when considering children with special education needs (Centres for social care, pediatrics etc). Sometimes different sectors do not agree that a child needs extra support and this can limit the possibilities of a certain child.



Preschool experts are aware that there is a difference between preschool and primary education. In kindergarten there is a free choice of activities and school system is much more structured. There is an example in Slovenia, where there are one classroom teacher and one preschool teacher in the first grade. Classroom teachers report that the link between the two systems has been cut. They perceive that there is no connection between preschool teacher and classroom teacher and this results in uneven demands toward children. They heard, through private contacts, that children have free choice of activities in kindergarten; if this is the truth they report that children in school very suddenly have to stop choosing. Moreover, they report that they have children in their classes with special educational needs that were not identified in the preschool system, or not identified on time. They believe that this shouldn't happen in a situation where a child was in the system for 5 years. They mention a case of a 6-year old that can not hold a pen properly, who has also been in the preschool system for 5 years. They wonder how it is possible that nobody has noticed that?

Additionally, classroom teachers think that the parents should make the final decision whether a child should go to school or not, but the system should enable sufficient informations about the child's level of readiness. They can not make an informed decision if they do not have enough information. Teachers think that the parents are not supported enough in making that decision. Parents can not know what circumstances will influence on their child in that transition. It would be helpful if they had (a team of) experts explaining what are their child's accomplishments in different developmental areas in comparison with school demands and that would give a parents enough information to be able to make that decision. Teachers notice that, in the educational system overall, there are people making important decisions that are not educated enough (or at all) or are missing important competences.

Classroom teachers underline that a preschool teacher has been with a child a longer period of time and that he/she surely knows that child very good. Assessment of school readiness with the school/medical commission is very short in duration and they express doubt in the accuracy of that assessment in comparison to a preschool teacher/expert.



Problem that experts from kindergarten pointed out is that quality of preschool programs and institutions varies a lot. Result is that some children get a lot from their preschool teachers/institutions and others do not.

4. Do you receive any guidance for helping the children in your group/classroom transition to primary school?

All experts agree that there is not enough education in this area. Preschool experts consult literature and expert team and they would like to be connected better with the classroom teachers.

Classroom teachers would like to attend educations considering latest findings in the field of developmental psychology, neuropsychology etc. In their opinion, most of education in that area consist of „recycled“ informations that are already known. They are interested in what is new; what is different in development and life od new generations. They do not expect that from their school speech therapist of pedagogist. Classroom teachers find verbal development as the area where they feel specially unsecure; some of them are even concerned whether their approach can make harm to a specific child because they do not have enough knowledge in that area and are not sure whether their behaviors can worsen the child's problems. They need educations that can direct their approach depening on child's needs and capabilities, indicate when they should ask other experts to help and make them more secure in their competences.



Primary school teachers mentioned that they very rarely have opportunity to be in possession of child's documentation (written by external expert as a psychologist, psychiatrist etc.) and when they do, they are not sure which expert opinion should be considered as relevant. They would like to have a conversation with their expert team considering every single child in order to prepare for every child better. Their impression is that „everything is a secret“ and that information is kept from them by their expert team in order to prevent prejudice towards a child. They lose a lot of time in an attempt to find information and that makes them low in efficiency. Information about children, in majority, comes from their parents, and those information are not from an expert point of view and are biased. They need specific information in order to help a child; in order to prepare and educate about a certain topic in advance and a child would be in a better position with a more appropriate approach. For example, sometimes it happens that there are two children in the same class that do not get along from kindergarten and that situation continues in school. This could have been prevented if they knew that information. When it comes to a child with special educational needs the situation is far more complex.

5. Which competences do you think are important for parents to have to support their children in the successful transition to primary school?

All experts agree that parents need to accept their children as they are. That means that they should be aware that children have different levels of competences. It is important for them to get to know their child and coordinate their expectations with their child's level of skills and possibilities. They should listen to their child because then their child will be able to listen to other people. Classroom teachers notice that parents have very high academic expectations from their children and this has a negative effect on their children's emotional competences. They think that preschool teachers also feel this pressure and that is why they try to incorporate writing and reading into preschool programs. Parents are focused on getting high grades from the start and are much more directed to education and teachers think that they should deal with nurture/upbringing more.



Teachers think that parents need support and empowerment because they are overwhelmed by numerous obligations.

Moreover, experts think parents should support children's autonomy and sense of competence. Sometimes parents do not allow their children autonomy when they should (taking care of themselves), but allow autonomy in decision making when they should not (screen time). They should encourage independence, dealing with frustrations, problem solving and develop values. They should surely set limits to their child so that a child learns to respect and set their own limits.

Classroom teachers point out that it is important for parents to be ready to communicate with school for a child's benefit. It would be helpful if they would also be able to accept different opinions and propositions without perceiving those as an assault. They should be ready to help their child and dedicate to him/she while trying to be without bias as much as they can be.

It is also important to be honest to themselves and their child (for example, one mother openly asked teacher to help her child with calculating over 100 because she has special needs and that is something that she can not help her child with).

6. Do you notice a difference in a child's preparedness for school nowadays compared to previous generations?

Preschool experts have noticed that previous generations of children were much more curious and more interested in the world surrounding them. Some parents say that they have to force children to go out in the park; that brings us back to the question who decides when it is the time to go out and who decides on involving in different kinds of activities.

Unfortunately, every generation is worse than the previous in terms of independence and fulfilling simple expectations (for example pulling the chair under the desk after getting up). Children do not take care of their possessions and do not feel the responsibility. This is a family matter; a lot of backpacks, jackets and other things are left in kindergarten during the summer season and no one ever comes to claim them. Parents verbally express their understanding of the importance of children's independence but they do not use knowledge passed to them by teachers in practice and continue to undermine children's independence and stay overprotective.



All experts agree that children's social skills are less developed in comparison to older generations. Children do not understand their and other children's needs. Some children demand fulfilling their needs instantly, in a very rude manner. Experts also relate this problem with their parent's tendency to do things for them instead of developing their independence and responsibility. Some children have problems with getting their hands and clothes dirty with mud, more often than in previous generations. Experts also noticed that children do not recognize streets in their neighborhood because they are driven by parents in cars and, accordingly, do not know how to behave in traffic as pedestrians. Children who are sensitive to other children's needs and react adequately are often from families with a bigger number of children.

Preschool experts notice that children have less effective stress coping skills and are more frustrated with everyday situations than they were before. They lack problem solving skills and express very high stress and frustration levels which are not in accordance with the situations (for example, a child left her cap on the yard and is crying without stopping because she doesn't know how to resolve this problem). Children also have troubles standing in line and often fight when they have to.

Moreover, classroom teachers notice that younger generations have problems with paper orientation. Teachers relate this issue with using digital devices. They also think that parents spend less time reading to their children and that is why some children start to read from the bottom of the page and from right side to the left.

To conclude, all experts agree that the biggest difference between younger generations and previous ones is in children's verbal competences, specifically verbal expression, which has significantly deteriorated with time. For example, text analysis in mother tongue is very, very hard for first graders and teachers relate that with less family play, conversation and reading time. Problems occur also with pronunciation and attention.



7. How do you think Covid-19 has affected the children’s performance in terms of competences and skills?

a. And if yes, what competences were most absent?

Experts from kindergarten believe that children who lack social skills have been affected by pandemic the most because they did not have a chance to practice their social skills and being without their parents. Also, they noticed that the last generation of preschoolers that they have „sent“ to school have developed lower levels of fine motor skills. This year's generation is more successful in graphomotoric skills and this could be because this school year we did not have a lock down in contrast to previous school year when children did not attend kindergarten at least for 3 months, and some even for a longer period of time.

Classroom teachers think that the pandemic did not have a significant effect on children's competences because the preschool system supported them.

8. Which competences do you believe are the most important for the successful transition of children from ECEC to primary school? (Rating scale from 1 to 5: not all important – extremely important)

	M
Overall health/Physical well-being	4,6
Psychomotor skills	
Gross psychomotor skills (e.g. running, jumping, climbing)	4,5
Fine psychomotor skills (e.g. writing, drawing, cutting)	4,5
Language and literacy skills	
Fluent communication	4,6
Vocabulary	4
Storytelling	4
Awareness of the written text	3,8
Knowing letters	3,2



Reading	2,3
Cognitive/ Pre-academic skills and general knowledge	
Pre-mathematical knowledge	4
Early numeracy skills	3,7
Sorting, ordering, classifying	4,2
Early life science concepts and general knowledge of the world that surrounds us	4,2
Self-care (e.g. brushing teeth, going to the bathroom, dressing up, eating)	4,8
Socioemotional skills	
Interpersonal skills	4,7
Communication	4,8
Relating and interacting with others	4,7
Self-regulation of emotions	4,8
Self-regulation of attention	4,8
Keeping focus	4,7
Behavioural self-control	4,8
Ability to follow instructions	4,7
Motivation and Learning	
Willingness to learn	4,7
Curiosity	4,3
Persistence	4,5
Attentiveness	4,7

9. In your opinion, do the children lack some of the competences listed above in the period of transition from ECEC to school? (*choose one answer*)

All experts answered affirmatively.



9a. If yes, please specify which competences listed above are they lacking the most and could need additional support to develop them

Experts listed socio-emotional competences.

10. Which competences do you think are important for parents to have so that they can support their children in the successful transition to primary school? (Rating scale from 1 to 5: not all important – extremely important)

	M
Building quality relationship with the child	4,8
Spending quality time with the child	4,8
Stimulating curiosity, motivation and learning	4,5
Supporting child's autonomy	4,8
Supportiveness	4,6
Responsiveness	4,8
Emotional warmth and tenderness.	5
Play	4,7
Communication	5
Explaining (rules, causes, consequences etc.)	4,5
Answering questions	4,8
Reading	4,8
Providing various experiences (neighborhood, local community, etc.)	4,7
Providing opportunities for interactions with peers	5



11. In your opinion, do the parents lack some of specific skills/behaviours listed above to support their children for successful transition from ECEC to primary school? (*choose one answer*)

All experts agreed that parents do lack specific skills/behaviours and listed almost every skill from the list.

12. Is there anything that I/we did not ask you regarding successful transition of children from ECEC to primary school and you think it is important to mention?

There were no additional comments.



PARENTS GROUP REPORT

Focus groups were conducted live with five parents in their homes.

1. Which competences of children do you believe are the most important for the successful transition of children from ECEC to primary school?

All parents singled out independence in terms of dressing, using the toilet, preparing a simple meal, unlocking the door etc. in case that a child stays home alone for a short period of time. Related to independence, parents also mentioned traffic safety; they think children should know how to behave in traffic and be safe, but also to know that they are not allowed to enter a stranger's car.

Parents think that social intelligence is very important competence (socializing, respect and communication and decent behavior), as well as emotional maturity. They say that it is important for a child to realize that he/she is transferring from play to an environment where he/she has to be more serious. Parents also consider self-confidence and self-awareness as important indicators of emotional competence as well as adjusting to a community with certain expectations (for example, sitting still for 45 minutes).

Parents mentioned that it is very important for children to have digital competences because they will not be able to manage school assignments without them.

Some parents shared their experience in terms of academic skills also; their experience is that a child should know how to read and write because majority of children have those skills and a teacher adjusts approach to majority so a child that does not have those skills stays behind. Their children did not have those skills and this caused fear and insecurity.



2. Which competences do you think are important for parents to have to support their children in the successful transition to primary school?

Parents think that their parental emotional stability and maturity can support their children. They perceive the transition to school as an important change for parents too and they think that is very important for a child that his/her parents know to “stay cool” when needed. At the same time, parents perceive that it is important to accept that their child is growing up and is not going to be at home for ever. It helps if they think that that is great :o) They said that it is important to communicate with their children and support them. Also, they said that communication with teacher and parent communication skills are also important.

They think that a parent's attitude toward school is a positive one; that the parents think that the school is a fun, good thing. It is important for the parents to be relaxed because the children will be then relaxed too.

3. Do you think that your relationship with your child is important for successful transition to school?

Parents think that that relationship is important in all other aspects of a child's life, including this transition. They think that because of their good relationship they talk to their children a lot, explain their obligations and assignments. They highlight that the parents shouldn't frighten their children with school.

Parents emphasized trust as an important part of that relationship (for example, that a child trusts their parents enough to tell if there is a problem and is not afraid of their reaction).

4. Do you think that the ECEC system has prepared your child for the successful transition to school?

All parents agree that ECEC system prepared their children for this transition. Kindergarten offered all activities needed for successful transition (they drew, wrote, enabled different experienced like field trips, theatre). Kindergarten also supported children in developing their



interests. In the preschool year they focused on developing attention and other skills important for the transition. In parent's opinion, kindergarten did not ignore physical development either and they were developing good cooperation with parents. Nothing was lacking; shortcomings were related to a specific person, not to a system.

5. Have you ever asked for assistance or guidance from your child's educators regarding the transition to primary school?

Parents went to PTAs regarding transition to school and were asked for their opinions by preschool experts. There was a possibility of individual consultations but parents in this group did not need it.

One mother was worried about her daughter social skills because she is shy. She knew no one in her school and mother was worried how is she going to make friends so she asked a primary teacher on her first PTA meeting how did her daughter manage that situation but everything was fine and there was no need for further assistance.

A couple of parents got guidance from a speech therapist but further support is lacking because there is not enough speech therapists in the preschool and school system available for therapy. A lot of children (including their own) have to attend private speech therapy.

Parents suggested organizing PTA meeting with school pedagogist/teacher; parents need information coming directly from the school system. They also suggested an app developed for that purpose. They believe that would make parents feel much more safe in terms of their child's school readiness. They believe that, in their case, this step was skipped because of the Covid situation.



6. How do you think Covid-19 has affected your child's performance in terms of competences and skills?

Parents think that preschool teachers alleviated impact of pandemic as well as the earthquake. Teachers were sending materials that they could use with their children at home and everything went smooth and they think that, thanks to the preschool institutions, Covid-19 had a minimal impact on their child's performance in terms of competences and skills.

Some parents think that their first graders now lack the seriousness of the school system. Children are confused and this could be because of the often interruptions of the process (self-isolations and on-line schooling). There is no continuity and that is why children have to compensate and there is too much to do in little time and they are overwhelmed.

Parents think that maybe some children felt the impact of pandemic because not all parents have the knowledge and approach of a preschool teacher and during the lockdown they could not offer their children appropriate activities, especially because they had to work and spend time with their children at the same time, in the same space. Children also could not attend additional activities as field trips etc. and spend time on open air as usual. Children who live in houses and are surrounded by nature were in better position than those in the cities. On the other hand, special circumstances in kindertagen related to Covid-10 protective measures helped children to adjust and follow those measures in schools.

a. Is there something that surprised you regarding your child's skills/ did you notice a lack of skills for your child?

One mother said that she expected her son will cry but she expected him to be crying for 2 days and it lasted for 2 weeks. She is aware of his emotional immaturity but the extent surprised her. Another one reported that her son is very silent in school. This was a very big surprise for her because this is not the child she knows; he is very communicative and open at home and in other environments. She thinks that maybe he does not feel good about his /academic competencies because he did not know how to write and read at the beginning.



Other mothers reported positive surprises; one was surprised by her daughter's inclusion in advanced mathematical program; she expected her daughter to excel in artistic and sport activities and did not know that she has mathematical potential also. Moreover, her daughter is shy but she enrolled herself in basketball practice and this was also a pleasant surprise in term of child's assertiveness. One mother reported that she is surprised by her daughter's perseverance in different tasks.

7. If you could do something different with for/with your child regarding transition from ECEC to primary school, that could better prepare her/him, what would it be?

One mother said that she would insist to know the teacher. She wanted to do that but her husband and friends told her to be at ease. Now she is sorry because she is not satisfied with the teacher. She thinks that the teacher does the “technical” part of the program very well, but that she is lacking emotional warmth and support and that her daughter and other children do not have the chance to develop their potentials because she does not offer anything out of the program while being very unflexible. She thinks that her daughter's class is lacking cheerfull moments.

Mother who's son is silent in school reported that she would support him more in his academic skills regarding writing and reading because she thinks that would made him more secure and not being behind other children. That mother thinks that he is aware that he is not living up to the expectations and this is maybe why he is slow and withdrawn.



8. Which competences do you believe are the most important for the successful transition of children from ECEC to primary school? (Rating scale from 1 to 5: not all important – extremely important)

	M
Overall health/Physical well-being	5
Psychomotor skills	
Gross psychomotor skills (e.g. running, jumping, climbing)	4,2
Fine psychomotor skills (e.g. writing, drawing, cutting)	4
Language and literacy skills	
Fluent communication	4,4
Vocabulary	4,2
Storytelling	3,6
Awareness of the written text	3
Knowing letters	3,4
Reading	2,8
Cognitive/ Pre-academic skills and general knowledge	
Pre-mathematical knowledge	3
Early numeracy skills	3,6
Sorting, ordering, classifying	3,4
Early life science concepts and general knowledge of the world that surrounds us	3,8
Self-care (e.g. brushing teeth, going to the bathroom, dressing up, eating)	4,8
Socioemotional skills	
Interpersonal skills	4,4
Communication	4,4
Relating and interacting with others	4,6
Self-regulation of emotions	4,4
Self-regulation of attention	3,8



Keeping focus	3,8
Behavioural self-control	4
Ability to follow instructions	4,2
Motivation and Learning	
Willingness to learn	4,4
Curiosity	4,6
Persistence	4,6
Attentiveness	4,4

9. In your opinion, do the children lack some of the competences listed above in the period of transition from ECEC to school? (choose one answer)

Two parents answered affirmatively

9a. If yes, please specify which competences listed above are they lacking the most and could need additional support to develop them

Parents listed encouraging curiosity, motivation and communication, self-regulation of emotions, reading motivation and reading.

10. Which competences do you think are important for parents to have so that they can support their children in the successful transition to primary school? (Rating scale from 1 to 5: not all important – extremely important)

	M
Building quality relationship with the child	5
Spending quality time with the child	5
Stimulating curiosity, motivation and learning	4,8
Supporting child's autonomy	4,8
Supportiveness	5



Responsiveness	5
Emotional warmth and tenderness.	5
Play	4,6
Communication	5
Explaining (rules, causes, consequences etc.)	4,8
Answering questions	5
Reading	4,4
Providing various experiences (neighborhood, local community, etc.)	4,6
Providing opportunities for interactions with peers	5

11. In your opinion, do the parents lack some of specific skills/behaviours listed above to support their children for successful transition from ECEC to primary school? (*choose one answer*)

All parents agreed that parents do not lack specific skills/behaviors.

12. Is there anything that I/we did not ask you regarding successful transition of children from ECEC to primary school and you think it is important to mention?

There were no additional comments.