



EXPERTS AND PARENTS INTERVIEWS REPORT (PA SBS, CROATIA)



CARE2LEARN

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

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EXPERTS AND PARENTS INTERVIEWS REPORT

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CARE2LEARN

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1. INTRODUCTION

Interviews with parents and experts were conducted in person. The respondents were 5 parents of children attending kindergarten, ECEC or primary school and 5 experts which work in ECEC or primary school (kindergarten psychologist, two classroom teachers and two preschool teacher).

2. INTERVIEWS FEEDBACK– PARENTS (SUMMARY REPORT)

The information gathered are a result of 5 individualistic interviews, as opposed to a focus group, due to the restrictive measures that must be adhered to for Covid-19.

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

The parents involved in the research expressed diverse opinions on this topic. A few of them agreed on the importance of **communication skills** (i.e. speaking their mother tongue fluently, being able to communicate their needs and emotions and one of the parents even mentioned speaking foreign languages). Parents also consider **socio-emotional maturity** as one of the key competences that helps children smoothly transition from ECEC institutions to primary school. This entails being able to differentiate between good and bad deeds and to recognize and name emotions in self and others. One of the parents considers all other competences and skills are easier to adopt, once the social maturity is achieved. A few parents highlighted the importance of developed **motor skills** in preschool children and those can involve being able to hold the pen properly, using scissors, drawing etc. They also consider **independence in simple self-care activities** (such as eating, dressing and maintaining personal hygiene) a crucial step in preparing a child for the transition to primary school. Actively working and practicing with a child is important – parents suggest doing didactic and methodical tasks through different games to make learning easier for children and to spark their curiosity. Other things parents brought up were: cultural awareness and expression, competences in science, initiative and entrepreneurship, learning competences - learning how to learn, research competencies and understanding the world, creative and artistic competencies, competencies of an active citizen.



2. What competences do you think are important for parents to have that could support their children in transition to primary school?

Parents agree on them having a **vital role** in supporting their children during their transition from ECEC to primary school. They are aware of their role as a **model for their child** and that they can greatly influence their children's lives by their actions. Taking that into account, they should lead by example by showing and practicing **self-respect, confidence, basic and fundamental human values** and **empathy**. Most parents think **patience** and **understanding** is the foundation of a quality parent-child relationship and that every parent should dedicate enough **time** to their child every day, to work and play with them and nurture their emotional bond. They also consider a pedagogically competent parent to be a parent who **knows the child's developmental abilities**, applies appropriate educational procedures, knows the opportunities provided by society for the upbringing and education of children and is able to choose the best for their child. Competent parents should be actively **involved in their child's educational process**.

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

a. How/why do you think so?

All parents agree that the relationship with their child is extremely important for their successful transition to primary school. They emphasize the need to **positively present the image of the school** to the child so that school can feel like a safe place for them. This can mean talking about the experience before the transition, **identifying possible fears or hesitations** that the child might have. It is important to **show interest in their new phase of life**, be physically present and **encourage them** with words of affirmation. In conclusion, the attitudes of parents towards primary school and learning are extremely important because of that they directly affect children's attitudes.



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

a. Why do you think so?

Three of the five parents think their children were prepared for the transition to primary school by the ECEC system. They stated that the children happily went to kindergarten, and later to school, had **no problems with separation** and knew the **basic school rules**, raising hands, etc. They also mentioned that the ECEC system helped their children in improving their **concentration**, developing **empathy** towards their peers, participation in games, developing **motor skills** and graphomotor skills and a number of other positive things.

The other two parents think the ECEC system prepared their children for school only to some extent. The readiness refers to **social readiness** (successful communication with peers and adults, independence and cooperation, adoption of norms of behavior and following rules), **emotional readiness** (recognizing and controlling emotions, postponing the satisfaction of their needs, separating from parents and independent functioning, evaluation of their achievements), **speech development** (listening, following and understanding instructions, clear pronunciation, everyday vocabulary, communicating their thoughts and needs), **intellectual maturity** (observation of connections and relations between things, development of observations, opinions, attention and memory, as well as adapting to new and changing situations), **psychomotor development** and **physical fitness**.

b. Is there anything lacking regarding preparation for school in the ECEC institution that your child attends?

Some of the parents think the ECEC system should give the children **more assignments** to prepare them for school, especially ones connected to **writing and developing graphomotor skills**. One of the parents stated that there is a **lack of information sharing between kindergarten and school** and joint planning of transition practices which might have positive effects on children's behaviour during the transition process and initial adjustment. They also pointed out **the number of children in the group**, because usually there are too many and the **personal approach to each child is lost**, meaning some children who might need it more (ie gifted children or children with disabilities) can feel neglected.



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

Three parents have not asked for assistance or guidance from their child's educators regarding the transition to primary school, but one of them regularly **communicated with educators** about the child's progress and preparation for the first grade. Two parents have asked for guidance, one from a **speech therapist**.

a. What kind of specific guidance was or would be helpful?

One of the parents shared that their daughter was quite messy with coloring and writing, which someone drew her attention to and then they **practiced tidiness** a little more at home. They think that the school should **recognize potential problems** in time and warn the parents so they can start working on it as soon as possible. Other parents state the guidelines should be to create a **transition curriculum** within which it would be possible to achieve continuity of educational activities. The guidelines should also be **clearer**, and the observation of the child made so that the child is helped from the very beginning of primary education.

b. Did your child's kindergarten help in the transition of your child to primary school?

All parents agree that the child's **kindergarten helped in the transition process** to primary school through the **preschool program** and activities such as workshops, plays, P.E., foreign language courses etc. One of them gave praise to the **preschool educators** for working hard and having an individual approach to each child. One of the parents said they noticed the help in **strengthening a positive image** of a child and their abilities, teaching them how to **say what they want** and how to **stand up for themselves, agreeing on rules and following them, teaching independence, satisfaction of the child's current interests**, supporting their **spontaneity and initiative, encouraging the child to express what they feel** etc. Two parents think that the mere fact that a child goes to kindergarten is enough help (because the child has already separated from the parent, because they already participated and worked in a closed group, because they eat outside their house, participate in games, develop motor skills etc.).



6. Do you think that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected your child's performance in terms of competences and skills necessary for successful transition to primary school?

Three parents think that the pandemic hasn't affected their child's performance in terms of competences and skills. Two parents think that it has, and as one of them says, it has affected every human being because it is impossible that this way of life does not affect your life in some sphere (which may manifest itself later). It did not affect their physical abilities, but what children were deprived of was **relationships / socializing with other children, extended family, relatives...**

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

One parent noticed a **lack of fine motor skills** when writing (neatness) and another child developed some **difficulties around reading**.

7. Which children's competences do you believe are the most important for the successful transition of your child to primary school?

Please, rate each competence on a scale from 1-not at all important to 5 extremely important.

The average score that was provided by each parent for each competence was calculated, in order to estimate the level of importance for each skill.

- **Overall health/Physical well-being:** 4.8

Psychomotor Skills:

- Gross psychomotor skills (e.g., running, jumping, climbing): 4.4
- Fine psychomotor skills (e.g., writing, drawing, cutting): 4.4

Language and literacy skills:

- Fluent communication: 4.6
- Vocabulary: 4.6
- Storytelling: 4.4
- Awareness of the written text: 3.6
- Knowing letters: 3.4
- Reading: 3.2

Cognitive/ Pre-academic skills and general knowledge

- Pre-mathematical knowledge: 3.6
- Early numeracy skills: 3.4



- Sorting, ordering, classifying: 4.0
- Early life science concepts and general knowledge of the world that surrounds us: 3.6

Self-care (e.g., brushing teeth, going to the bathroom, dressing up, eating): 5.0

Socioemotional skills:

- Interpersonal skills: 5.0
- Communication: 5.0
- Relating and interacting with others: 5.0
- Self-regulation of emotions: 5.0
- Self-regulation of attention: 4.8
- Keeping focus: 4.8
- Behavioral self-control: 5.0
- Ability to follow instructions: 4.8

Motivational and learning:

- Willingness to learn: 4.2
- Curiosity: 5.0
- Persistence: 4.6
- Attentiveness: 4.6

8. In your opinion, does your child need additional support to develop some of the competences listed above in the period of transition to school? (Choose one answer)

YES or NO

Four parents stated 'NO', that their child does not require additional support, whilst one parent reported 'YES'.

a. If yes, please specify which competences listed above does he/she lack the most and could need additional support to develop them.

The parent that answered 'YES' to the previous question said that the will and **desire to learn** is something their child lacks.

9. What competences of parents do you think are important for you to have to support your child's transition to primary school?

One parent highlighted the importance of **patience, support** and **unconditional love**.

Please, rate each competence on a scale from 1-not at all important to 5 extremely important

- Building quality relationship with the child: 5.0
- Spending quality time with the child: 5.0



- Stimulating curiosity, motivation and learning: 4.8
- Supporting child's autonomy: 4.8
- Supportiveness: 5.0
- Responsiveness: 4.4
- Emotional warmth and tenderness: 5.0
- Play: 4.4
- Communication: 5.0
- Explaining (rules, causes, consequences etc.): 5.0
- Answering questions: 4.8
- Reading: 4.8
- Providing various experiences (neighborhood, local community, etc.): 4.8
- Providing opportunities for interactions with peers: 5.0

10. In your opinion, do you think that you could use an additional support to develop some of the above specified parental skills/behaviours to support your child for successful transition to school?

YES or NO

Four from the five parents reported 'NO' in this question, whilst one indicated 'YES'.

a. If yes, please specify which competences/behaviours do you lack the most and could need additional support to develop them.

The parent that responded 'YES' to the previous question shared that they could use some support in encouraging **curiosity, motivation and learning**. They stated that the most important thing is to **find a way to explain the rules, effects and impacts of their actions to kids** in a way that is understandable to them, instead of using punishment methods. They also mentioned that they could use help in answering some of their child's questions and building a quality relationship with them – which is the hardest thing.



11. 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?

One of the parents thinks that some parents rely only on preschool and the work of educators with their children, which is sometimes not enough. They think it's every parent's responsibility to **invest their time and patience in working with the child during the transition period** from ECEC to primary school. The everyday tasks in first grade are much bigger than the ones in ECEC. The child suddenly has to learn how and when to rest, listen, focus, be punctual etc. All this can be a big shock to their system. The child in this period of life is in dire need of parents' support. In order for a child to have a nice and easy start of the school experience, to like this new beginning without being disappointed and lost, the parents really need to **be supportive throughout the whole process**. Another parent points out a difference between the **"child ready for school"** and the **"school ready for a child" model**. The first one suggests that children should work hard to prepare for primary school and is based on the readiness of the child for school as a criterion for enrollment in primary school, while the second model implies that schools should adapt to the child and their needs.

12. 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?

Two parents consider their children's transition to be successful and wouldn't do anything substantially different. One of them said that it's important that their child learned how to take care of tidying up their bag and school supplies. They also mentioned that they taught them **responsibility** and made them as **independent** as possible, along with doing some standard exercises such as drawing, writing, reading...

Other three parents could think of some things they could have done differently. One of them thinks they should have practiced **reading** more, while the other one regrets not getting more **involved in the educational process** in preschool and primary school. The last parent thinks they should have given their child **more 'carefree time'** – enrolling them in art workshops, spending more time in nature and out with friends etc. They would have been more patient and spend more time playing and having fun with the child, instead of constantly reminding them of what has to be done for school.



3. INTERVIEWS FEEDBACK – EXPERTS (SUMMARY REPORT)

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

The experts completed the questionnaire in the same manner that the parents did; via individual interview. However, the experts varied in their backgrounds as:

- One is a **kindergarten psychologist**;
- Two individuals were **primary school teachers**;
- Two individuals were **kindergarten teachers**

Experts listed a number of factors that they think contribute to a child's smooth transition from pre-school to primary school. The preschool expert said that a one-year preschool program is welcomed as an adjustment to the transition from kindergarten to elementary school. Children then develop greater autonomy and concentration in solving tasks. It is worth encouraging more complex forms of thinking, cooperation, interconnectedness, learning experience and connection with previous knowledge and experiences. **Individual approach** to the child is necessary in order for him to accept the change of the environment as easily as possible and to accept a new role in his life - the role of a student. The expert educator added that the smooth transition of children from preschool to primary school contributes to the **maturity of the child** in several areas: physical maturity (good health and proper physical development), intellectual maturity (well-developed speech, developed attention, psychomotor skills, memory and thinking) emotional maturity (self-control and emotional stability) and social maturity (adaptability to school obligations and behaviors, communication and interaction with peers and adults, and independence in caring for oneself and one's belongings). They all agree that **emotional maturity** is one of the key components in a child's transition to elementary school. The more emotionally mature a child is, the more ready he is to accept changes and new challenges in the school environment and to be more ready to adapt to new situations. Also important is the **psychological preparation** of the child and the creation of work habits in the child in preschool age. The primary school teacher added that the **creation of a social and spatial-material, inclusive stimulating environment** also contributes to the smooth transition of children from pre-school to primary school. Designing appropriate learning experiences that meet the needs of children and encourage their development. Observing, collecting, monitoring and documenting information about children in order to gain insight into the individual development of children's achievements and interests. Encouraging children to self-evaluate, i.e. self-reflection on their own experiences and the application of their own reflections in thinking about new activities.



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

All experts said that **emotional maturity** of the child, which includes **self-regulation of emotions, communication and successful interaction with other students**, is one of the most important competencies that a child must develop to feel safe and successful transition from kindergarten to school. Also, they said that it goes without saying that for a successful transition from kindergarten to school child needs to have **hygienic habits, independence - when eating, dressing, navigating time and space, rough but also fine motor skills (especially fingers), developed voice analysis and synthesis, motivation and desire to learn, developed speech, have empathy - have feelings of care for others, help peers, respect teachers and elders, rich vocabulary appropriate to age, responsibility and complete tasks on time, they need to know how to orient himself/herself spatially and the child should learn to direct his attention by the time he starts school.**

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

All experts said that they noticed a lack of some skills in children and two of the experts singled out **hand motor skills and fine motor skills of hands and fingers**, which one of the experts believes are absolutely absent in current generations. The other expert believes that less and less children come to school with **adopted spatial relationships and that they have problems comparing items and sorting them by given criteria. Also, both experts noticed a change in coping** in life-practical situations which in their opinion is the result of the overprotective style of parenting.

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

One of the experts thinks that the Croatian national curriculum for early and preschool education presupposes everything, but probably the whole situation is both economically and socially demanding, groups of children in kindergartens are too large, aunts in kindergartens are overburdened and of course the expected results are lacking.

Second expert said that the existing preschool system in preparing children for this transition lacks **forming groups** so that preschool children are separated into a special group because in many mixed groups educators cannot adequately dedicate themselves to preschoolers, **paying more attention to graphomotor exercises**, rather than incorrect letter writing (which teachers cannot correct later), teaching children to **hold a pen correctly** and **active involvement of parents**



All five experts started the ***lack of professional cooperation*** between all experts in the educational system. One of them suggested organizing workshops that would guide parents towards what they especially need to develop in their child.

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

All experts said that they don't get guidelines to help the children transition from their group to elementary school.

a. What kind of specific guidance do you believe was or would be helpful?

One of the experts who is primary school teacher said that ***any valid information*** is welcome to the teacher who will spend the with the child him most sensitive. Of course, from the family history, through the doctor's, behavior in kindergarten, with other children, all this is useful information that teachers often comes across over time. Three of the experts declared that it would be a useful guide on ***how to help a child who is neglected in the family or has some specific learning and behavioral difficulties***. The expert who is kindergarten psychologist believes that knowledge is not a measure of a child's readiness and that we should strive for general preparedness, not specific.

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

Experts think that parents can ***do a lot on their own*** if they only listen to their child and make sure that the child's emotions come first. One of the experts said that it is important for a child to continue to feel like a part of the family, not just to become a first grader and it is necessary to ***stimulate curiosity and motivation*** to learn and show personal interest in school because it sends the message "if mom and dad are important school then it is really important."

Other experts listed that important competencies of parents to support children in a successful transition to primary school are: ***consistency in raising a child*** (setting a clear boundaries and be consistent in implementing them), ***caring*** (take time to talk, walk, read stories, play with the child) and ***cooperation*** (to cooperate with the teacher in order to achieve the best possible results for the child).



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

The answers of the experts varied on this question. Two of the experts said that they didn't notice a difference and they believe that a lot depends on the interests and personality of the child himself. One of the experts notice a difference in a child's readiness for school today compared to previous generations and said that nowadays, students are less independent and irregular in their work, they lack more physical activity, they are less concentrated and find it harder to follow the teacher's instructions. The last expert noticed progress in the available opportunities for preparation and the extracurricular environment, but due to too much emphasis on knowledge, the emotional component in the child's development and preparation for school is neglected.

7. Do you think that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the children's performance in terms of competences and skills necessary for successful transition to primary school?

Only one of the experts said that the the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the children's performance in terms of competences and skills necessary for successful transition to primary school.

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

The expert said that the greatest impact was on children's social competences.

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

The competences that experts mentioned are: relationships and interaction with others, self-regulation of emotions, self-regulation of attention, maintenance of concentration, self-control of behavior, ability to follow instructions, will and desire to learn, curiosity and attention.

Please, rate each competence on a scale from 1-not at all important to 5 extremely important

- **Overall health/Physical well-being:** 5

Psychomotor Skills:

- Gross psychomotor skills (e.g., running, jumping, climbing): 4.6
- Fine psychomotor skills (e.g., writing, drawing, cutting): 4.6

Language and literacy skills:

- Fluent communication: 4.6
- Vocabulary: 4, 4, 5



- Storytelling: 5, 3, 4
- Awareness of the written text: 5, 1, 4
- Knowing letters: 1, 1, 4
- Reading: 1, 1, 4

Cognitive/ Pre-academic skills and general knowledge

- Pre-mathematical knowledge: 5, 4, 3
- Early numeracy skills: 5, 3, 3
- Sorting, ordering, classifying: 5, 5, 4
- Early life science concepts and general knowledge of the world that surrounds us: 5, 3, 4
- **Self-care** (e.g., brushing teeth, going to the bathroom, dressing up, eating): 4.6

Socioemotional skills:

- Interpersonal skills: 5
- Communication: 5
- Relating and interacting with others: 5
- Self-regulation of emotions: 5
- Self-regulation of attention: 5
- Keeping focus: 5
- Behavioural self-control: 5
- Ability to follow instructions: 5

Motivational and learning:

- Willingness to learn: 4.6
- Curiosity: 4.6
- Persistence: 5
- Attentiveness: 4.6

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 said that in their opinion children lack some of the competences listed above in the period of transition from ECEC to school.



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

The competences experts listed as competences that children lack the most during the transition from preschool to primary school are: ability to follow instructions, persistence, attention, interpersonal skills, communication, relationships and interaction with others, self-regulation of emotions, self-regulation of attention, maintaining concentration, self-control behavior and fine psychomotor skills and socio-emotional skills.

One of the experts who is primary school teacher stressed that a child who achieves good communication and interaction with peers and teachers (primarily listening to others), who can control their emotions at all times and maintain concentration for a long time should not have problems during the transition from preschool to primary school.

10. What competences of parents do you think are important for you to have to support your child's transition to primary school?

Please, rate each competence on a scale from 1-not at all important to 5 extremely important

- Building quality relationship with the child: 5
- Spending quality time with the child: 5
- Stimulating curiosity, motivation and learning: 5
- Supporting child's autonomy: 5
- Supportiveness: 5
- Responsiveness: 5
- Emotional warmth and tenderness: 5
- Play: 5
- Communication: 5
- Explaining (rules, causes, consequences etc.): 5
- Answering questions: 5
- Reading: 4.6
- Providing various experiences (neighborhood, local community, etc.): 4.6
- Providing opportunities for interactions with peers: 4.6



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 believe that parents lack some of specific skills/behaviours to support their children for successful transition from ECEC to primary school.

a. If yes, please specify which competences/behaviours are they lacking and could need additional support to develop them.

Competences/behaviours that parents are lacking in expert's opinion are: spending quality time with the child, communication, reading with them and to them, explaining the rules, causes and consequences, motivation to create a quality relationship with the child, setting clear boundaries and be consistent in implementing them

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 just some final thoughts by our experts. One of them emphasize that it is very important for parents to fill in ***the questionnaire*** honestly and objectively when enrolling the child to primary school in order to approach their child in the best way. The other expert said that children should first and foremost be allowed to be children and just because they will go to school there is no need to kill their creativity. It is important that the child develops positive attitudes towards school and the teacher, but also that the child is prepared to go to school.

4. CONCLUSIONS/SUMMARY

We conducted 10 interviews, incorporating 5 experts that varied in their backgrounds and 5 parents that had children that were attending kindergarten or are in first class of primary school. The results of the interviews provided us with a lot of useful information and will definitely help us in the further development of our project with which we aim to provide help for children, parents and teachers in transition from kindergarten to primary school.