



ARTICLE 1

SCHOOL READINESS AND THE TRANSITION TO PRIMARY SCHOOL WITHIN THE CARE2LEARN PROJECT



CARE2LEARN

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

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PROJECT INFORMATION

PROJECT ACRONYM:

CARE2LEARN

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

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KA2 – STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP FOR SCHOOL EDUCATION

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Early years' experiences and interactions are undoubtedly essential for various developmental outcomes and children's adaptation to everyday functioning and later learning, including learning within the formal school environment. In this manner, the transition from early childhood education and care (ECEC) programmes to primary school is considered one of childhood's critical periods. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that all children are adequately prepared for this transition, especially considering that the lack of specific skills and knowledge at school entry can be a risk factor for later academic and life success. Encouraging necessary skills and competences within the ECEC institutions (if a child attends one), but primarily within the usual everyday home interactions and activities, can contribute to a better adjustment to the demands of school. The transition to formal schooling becomes even more important concerning various risk factors that some children and families could be facing, but also within the general context of the current Covid-19 pandemic that represents an additional source of stress for many parents, educators and children. Since the transition to formal schooling and the construct of school readiness are the basis of the planned project activities within the CARE2LEARN project, these aspects will be briefly outlined here.

Preparation for the demands of formal schooling begins very early in life, but it should not be comprehended as a formal preparation. Namely, the base of the school readiness develops from an early age primarily through usual everyday child-environment interactions, play and building stable and quality relationships. In this manner, different personal and contextual factors can be associated with a child's skills and competences necessary for a successful transition to primary school. Within the broader educational context, educational policy documents in different countries clearly emphasise certain competences associated with success in schooling and life in general.

Although there are certain differences in setting the competence framework in different countries, generally, more similarities than differences could be encountered in emphasising crucial skills and knowledge and the fact that their development begins early in life. However, it should also be taken into consideration that, depending on the country, the age of children enrolling in formal education varies (between four and seven). Hence, it is not feasible to achieve worldwide consensus on defining what exactly means that the child is ready for formal schooling and to uniformly decide on the exact level of knowledge and skills required for a successful start of compulsory education on a global level due to different starting points of formal education.



In addition, differences regarding the enrolment of children in ECEC institutions are also one of the concerns when discussing school readiness. Namely, besides cross-national differences regarding ECEC attendance and practices in Europe, many EU countries face substantial regional differences in enrolment of children in preschool programmes and affordability and the quality of these programmes. Furthermore, keeping in mind the unequal enrolment opportunities in ECEC institutions, the role of the family context in supporting a child's school readiness is even more important.

School readiness generally refers to the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for children's success within the context of formal schooling or to the minimum developmental level that allows the child to respond to the demands of school adequately. Despite some disagreements between scientists and practitioners regarding the exact meaning of this construct, there is an agreement that school readiness is a multidimensional construct encompassing different developmental aspects, and it is a result of the interaction of child and environment - family, educational institutions and the community. This multidimensional perspective departs from a narrow focus on (pre)academic skills solely that undermines the potential of ECEC programmes. Further, the recognition that school readiness goes much beyond early academic skills is also present among practitioners, researchers, and educational policymakers. The child who is ready for school can be considered competent in several domains, and, as already mentioned, school readiness results from the interaction of child-related and context-related factors. Hence, fostering the capacities of both the child and the context is essential for developing children's school readiness and a successful transition to school.

Considering that children enter school at different starting points and that these differences can further expand, special attention should be paid to children and families facing various risk factors. Namely, various risk factors (e.g., socioeconomical disadvantages, minority status, health issues, exposure to violence, lack of stimulation...) contribute to deepening the achievement gap between children over time. Hence, it is necessary to support a successful transition to formal schooling for all children coming from different backgrounds. In this manner, the ECEC institutions are often emphasised as the key to reducing later achievement differences associated with children's backgrounds due to the benefits for children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, building families' strengths for supporting the development of children's school readiness skills through everyday playtime activities in a stimulating environment should also be a goal of various interventions to decrease starting differences at the beginning of formal schooling.



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