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Transition Processes from Kindergarten to Primary School

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Abstract

Starting primary school is a new and potentially stressful experience for most children. Previous involvement in early childhood institutions can facilitate children's transition to primary school.

The transition from kindergarten to primary school is interpreted as a process of change in the educational environment. It entails changes in the identity of a child, i.e. of process participants, strategies and forms of learning, context and purpose of children's games, role of the family and, almost as a rule, increased and intensified demands toward children with simultaneous reduction of children's autonomy when deciding on their daily activities. It can contribute to the development of self-esteem and early academic achievements.

This paper gives a research overview of kindergarten and primary school professionals' opinion on the existing practice of organized transition processes and their benefits in regard to children. The statistically significant difference ($p \leq .05$) of the participants' assessment was determined for the processes of children's visit, individual work with children, joint events, and certain forms of cooperation. Conversations with children, kindergarten children's visits to primary schools and lectures for parents are recognized as the most frequently organized transition processes. Representing the most important supporting activities, monitoring and documentation of children's development and joint studying are absent.

Key words: *cooperation; formal education; growing-up communities; resistance to change; supporting activities.*

Introduction

In the contemporary world, childhood has become increasingly institutionalized. Due to educational institutions' adaptation to the labour market, certain children of early age spend more time with kindergarten professionals than with their parents

(Juul, 2009). Although individual personality should not be disregarded, the conditions of child's growing up have a significant impact on their development and educational outcomes. Recent sources point to the link between the academic achievements of children with family resources, i.e. the socio-economic status of the family and the parents' education (Espring-Andersen, 2009; Machin & Vignoles, 2004) and the quality of the institutional early childhood education (Anderson, Shinn, Fullilove, Scrimshaw, Fielding, Normand, & Carande-Kulis, 2003; Barnett & Belfield, 2006).

The quality of institutional education is a significant predictor of early academic skills – early literacy, language expression, and overall learning (Belsky, Blomeyer, 2008; Vandell, Burchinal, Clarke-Stewart, McCartney, & Tresch Owen, 2007; Morrisey & Warner, 2007; Vandell, Belsky, Burchinal, Steinberg, & Vandergrift, 2010). Standardized normative assessments of children's cognitive status indicate that children included in early childhood institutions achieve better results when compared to those cared for only by their parents (Loeb, Bridges, Bassok, Fuller, & Rumberger, 2007; Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2004; Vandell et al., 2010), or other adults (Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2005). Morrisey and Warner (2007) noted a positive impact on the cognitive development and academic achievements only in those children who had been involved in early childhood institutions for a long time. Barnett and Ackerman (2006) observed a link between cognitive-oriented early childhood programmes and early academic achievements, but such effects are lost very quickly in further education (Magnuson et al., 2004). The influence of institutional early childhood education is generally higher in children who grow up at a risk of poverty, in families of lower economic status and socially deprived families (Barnett & Ackerman, 2006; Loeb, Fuller, Kagan, & Carrol, 2004).

Apart from the quality and the type of early education programme, the impact of children's inclusion in early education institutions is also related to the level and quality of kindergarten teachers' education (Gormley et al., 2005), teachers' personality traits (Howes, 2000; Vandell, 2004), the number of children in an educational group (CFWP; 2003), the length of children's stay in kindergarten (Vandell et al., 2010), and the cooperation between teachers and parents (Anderson, 2003; Barnett & Belfield, 2006). Vandell (2004) found a link between the teachers' stability and the quality of communication with the child's social competences. Peisner-Feinberg, Burchinal, Clifford, Culkin, Howes, Kagan, and Yazeijan (2001) emphasize the advantages of a democratic teaching style, while Loeb et al. (2004) point to the importance of the entire spatial-material and social environment. The number of children in a group is an important predictor of the development of younger children, while the teacher's education is a more significant predictor of the development of pre-academic skills in older preschool children. A smaller number of children in a group allows for a pronounced safe attachment between children and teachers, less restrictive teacher behaviour, and higher pro-social competences among children (CFWP, 2003).

Some studies also point to possible negative outcomes of a long-term stay in institutions of early childhood education. Vandell et al. (2010) observed a negative

correlation between longer stays and pro-social behaviour in terms of resistance to authority. The findings of this research on the population of children in Croatia have not been confirmed. Jurčević Lozančić (1996) believes that the children who had been in the institutional early childhood education for a longer period of time were socially and emotionally more stable and exhibited less behavioural problems than children enrolled in a shorter early childhood programme.

It may be concluded that the inclusion of children in institutional early childhood education has a dominantly positive correlation with children's later academic achievement. Although positive effects become gradually lost in further education, the importance of positive early experiences and achievements as motivators for further learning should not be overlooked. Positive early experiences also facilitate the inclusion of children in primary school as well as development of their socio-emotional competences, confidence, and self-esteem. This indicates the significance of the transition processes.

Transition Processes

The transition is interpreted as a process of changing the educational environment, i.e. the time from the first contact of an individual with a new educational environment to the regular attendance of this institution (Dockett & Perry, 2001). It assumes the transition of children from kindergarten to another kindergarten and from kindergarten to primary school. It usually brings about a significant change in the structure of daily rhythm, forms of playing, learning and social interaction, but also in the identity of the child and the role of the family. The roles of other process participants, such as kindergarten and school teachers, also change in relation to the child. The transition from kindergarten to primary school increases and intensifies the demands on children, while simultaneously reducing the children's autonomy in deciding and choosing their daily activities (Fabian & Dunlop, 2005). The transition to primary school likewise instigates a significant change in the identity of children – they were the oldest in kindergarten and now they are the youngest in school. Inclusion in primary school and the role of a student imposes new demands on children – respecting school rules, rhythm of activities, and fulfilling their obligations. How well a child accepts and adapts to this role determines their first grade success and largely depends on the quality of transition processes (Einarsdottir, Perry, & Dockett, 2008; Rous, Hallam, McCormick, & Cox, 2010).

The transition from one educational community to another can be interpreted as both a challenge and a threat. For children, this is a chance for new friendships and learning experiences. However, for most children and often for their parents, the transition presents a stressful experience followed by insecurity and fear of the unknown. Potential stress and uncertainty can be prevented by timely obtained information, systematic understanding of the process, learning about the new environment and flexible adaptation to expectations.

Although the majority of research explores the opinions of adults on children's education, the findings of certain studies (Broström, 2008) indicate that preschool children understand the need to go to school and are aware of changes and new rules, but they also expect a larger amount of playing. It is therefore justified to systematically develop transition processes between communities in which a child is raised and to adapt these communities to children – to their needs (e.g. learning through play) in order to facilitate children's socialization, to positively affect their development, and to enable early achievements (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007). Systematic research of transition and early outcomes of children has shown (Dockett & Perry, 2007):

- Children's self-perception largely depends on the early outcomes, and is reflected on the long-term ones;
- When starting school, children are taking their early experiences, attitudes and modes of understanding social situations with them and applying them to the new ones;
- Children who experienced negative situations and initial failure, together with children from socially deprived families, will probably experience difficulties during their education and later while growing up;
- Children who come from a family featuring behaviour and expectation patterns similar to the ones in the educational institution will probably undergo the transition much easier.

This points to the need for joint activities of families, kindergartens and primary schools, and the inclusion of children as active participants, which should also be recognized by the public education policy.

In the Republic of Croatia, the time of entering the school system and the manner of inclusion of children in primary school is determined by legal stipulations. Children who turned six years of age up to April 1 of the current year (Primary and Secondary Education Act, 2017) need to start school. Early inclusion is also possible (justified by a child's giftedness) as well as a later inclusion due to the estimated delay in the development of certain children. In practice, early inclusion in primary school is usually initiated by parents. At the same time, a delay is sometimes recommended for children from socially deprived families due to their lack of social competences and observed emotional insecurity. This delay in the inclusion in primary school generally denotes staying in the same social environment, which already has a negative impact on the child's status.

The educational policy in Croatia, assuming a better inclusion in primary school, introduced an obligatory attendance of preschool (Guidance on the Content and Duration of the Preschool Programme, 2014), a normative assessment of the child's psychophysical status for starting primary school and conversations with parents (Guidance on the Procedure of Determining the Psychophysical Status of the Child, Student and the Expert Commissions, 2014). Compulsory preschool attendance should

encourage children's development, alleviate their fear from the unknown, strengthen their social competences, and develop individual learning patterns. Unfortunately, previous experience points to the *scholarizing* of preschool, i.e. of directing it toward the discourse of normative academic achievements while disregarding individual personality (Armstrong, 2008). Disregard of the emotional well-being of children can reduce their learning motivation, and increase behavioural and interpersonal issues between children/students (Kieing, 2002). Concern and stress are increased (as a subjective assessment of an individual), which exacerbates aggressive behaviours or detachment and disrupts the ability to learn (Featherstone, 2004).

Assessment of the child's status in regard to starting primary school is carried out by professional associates in primary schools, most often psychologists. Although the transfer of childcare documents from kindergartens is assumed, it is generally not the case. Planned conversations with parents occur only sporadically, following an observed deviation in development. Failure to recognize children's development history and assess the status of children outside their primary social environment does not contribute to a complete understanding of their status. Simultaneously, the assessment of children augments the boundary between kindergarten and primary school. Requirements for measurable achievements and reaching the set levels of psychophysical status can adversely affect the child's self-perception, self-esteem, and confidence. Testing, under the guise of a balanced formation of the class, alongside incomplete knowledge regarding the entire development process, does not contribute to the objectivity of the assessment. The humanistic approach to the inclusion of children of under-average developmental status additionally contributes to the questionability of the need for testing and normative development determinants as proofs of children's readiness for school.

Synergy of the Joint Activity of Families, Kindergartens and Primary Schools

Following the inclusion in an educational institution, children are expected to adapt to a social environment which is often culturally different and difficult for them to understand. Family and institutional culture, interpreted as a way of life – the construct of values, norms, behaviour, and communication – often differ. These differences, albeit logical, are difficult for children to understand and can hinder quality engagement of children. Educational institutions expect from children/students and their families to accept value orientations, social norms, and forms of behaviour, which requires acceptance of changes in an individual's identity, role, and relationships (Griebel & Niesel, 2000). Studies on children's adaptation to institutions point to the importance of socialization and cultural connection between family communities and institutions – kindergartens and schools (Fabian & Dunlop, 2006).

Family, kindergarten, and primary school denote communities in which the majority of today's children live and grow. Cooperation and jointly designed activities, alongside

respect for and acknowledgment of children's personalities, can greatly facilitate the transition and support the children in starting primary school. Inclusion of children as active transition participants takes into account children's rights, but also the individual's responsibility for personal growth and development (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

Globalization processes and economic trends affect the culture of communities in which children grow up. Basic family activities are being reduced and leisure time is changing (Visković, 2016). Certain family functions, such as education, are being increasingly taken over by the society, which does not diminish the importance of family in children's upbringing. Joint action, goal orientation, and motivation of families and professional workers, optimism and willingness to cooperate, as well as openness to building partnerships all contribute to the quality of transition. Partnerships thereby presuppose mutual respect and equality of the process participants, and are recognizable by flexibly coordinated transition processes tailored to individuals' personalities.

Kindergarten and primary school are both directed toward education, but they generally have different approaches and expected outcomes. While primary school is predominantly focused on academic achievement, that is specific knowledge and skills, kindergartens assume a holistic approach to children's development. The education process in kindergartens is directed toward social interaction, building a secure attachment, and supporting interpersonal relationships. These institutions' differing approaches are often determined by parental behaviour.

Families are especially important for the emotional status of children, their psychophysical development, building of resistance to change, learning to solve problem situations, and empowering the child for the transition. Developed resistance to change and familial support can help decrease the feelings of anxiety and confusion in dealing with the unknown. At the same time, openness and availability of schools can provide a sense of security and support.

Maintaining a rigid school structure directed towards content teaching and distancing the teachers, does not contribute to the long-term welfare of children, and can instigate early abandonment of formal education. Conversely, positive transition experiences, high quality inclusion, and early achievements contribute to child empowerment, learning motivation, and long-term academic achievement. This indicates the importance of the social environment in which a child is raised, primarily the support of the family and kindergarten, as well as openness toward cooperation with the primary school.

Methodology

In order to establish the existing practice of implementing processes of transition from kindergarten to primary school and the importance which practitioners attribute to certain transition processes, the opinion of professional staff – school teachers,

kindergarten teachers and professional associates – was explored. In accordance with recent global research, the aim of this study was to determine the presence of certain transition processes in the institutional educational practice as an indicator to understanding the importance of transition processes and as a guideline for further work. Proposed hypotheses assume the following:

H_1: There is no statistically significant difference in the assessment of the importance of transition processes or participation in them between professional workers in kindergartens and primary schools.

H_2: Informing children about school and kindergarten children's visits to primary school are the most frequent transition processes.

H_3: It is assumed that the relevance which practitioners attribute to certain transition processes is related to the age of research participants, length of their work experience, and level of education.

Processing of the collected data also provides insight into participation of the practitioners' subsample in the transition processes and the possible link between the transition process participation and the age of professional staff.

The research involved two subsamples: professional practitioners from kindergartens and primary schools. The research was conducted within the regular functioning of the institution (at professional councils) wherein the participants were guaranteed anonymity. All potential participants were informed about the purpose of the research. Research participation was voluntary.

The collected data were processed using the Statistical Program for Social Sciences 20 (SPSS20). For general description purposes, central tendency and dispersion measures were calculated. The factor analysis of the scale used was applied to determine key factors. Using the Scree Test in extraction, the Principal Component Analysis was employed. Correlation was considered through the Pearson coefficient of correlation, while the t-test investigated the assessment significance according to subsamples. The difference in the frequency of participation in certain transition processes regarding kindergarten and primary school practitioners was investigated by the χ^2- test. Participation of practitioners in transition processes according to their age was shown through the application of Boxplot.

The sample included teachers in lower grades of primary school and kindergarten teachers from early childhood institutions in the wider area of the Makarska coast, as well as professional associates from these educational institutions. The sample was adequate. It encompassed 146 professional workers, 80 of whom work in kindergartens and 66 in primary schools. According to data from the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2016), there are 3 593 professional workers in primary schools and 2 071 in kindergartens in Split-Dalmatia County, but there is no publicly available data on the local population. As estimated by the researchers, 95% of professional staff in kindergartens and up to 40% of teachers and associates in primary schools on the Makarska coast have agreed to participate in this research. The sample included only

two male teachers, therefore the subsamples were not considered in relation to gender. Respondents' average age was 40.4 years (SD=9.09), ranging from 21 to 64 years of age, while the mode was 40 years (f=15, which is 10.2% of the sample). The average length of professional work experience of the subjects is 14.92 (SD=9.51), ranging from beginners to 40 years of professional work experience (f=2), while the mode is 15 years (f=12, which is 8.2% of the sample).

Table 1

Structure of the respondents according to occupation and work place

		Occupation				Total
		kindergarten teacher	school teacher	professional associate	assistant	
Work place	kindergarten	75	0	5	0	80
	primary school	0	55	10	1	66
Total		75	55	15	1	146

The relative majority of professional workers included in the sample, 45.6% (N = 67) of them, have two years of higher education, while only one respondent employed as a professional associate has a postgraduate degree (Table 2). The subsample of professional workers in kindergartens is representative both in size and structure although it does not feature teachers with high school education (according to the available data, there is one such employee in the population). The subsample of professional workers in primary schools cannot be considered representative, however, it is indicative for the insight into the existing practice. Collected and processed data present guidelines for further work – understanding the importance of transition processes, their implementation in regular work, and further systematic research.

Table 2

Structure of respondents according to level of education and work place

		Level of education				Total
		Higher education	Bachelor's degree	Graduate education / Master's degree	Postgraduate education	
Occupation	kindergarten teacher	52	11	12	0	75
	school teacher	15	1	39	0	55
	professional associate	0	0	14	1	15
	assistant	0	0	1	0	1
Total		67	12	66	1	146

The instrument *Questionnaire on the frequency and significance of transition processes* was devised for the purpose of this research. Alongside the introductory part, wherein the purpose of the research is clearly clarified, it encompasses independent demographic variables (age, gender, level of education, place of employment),

assessment scale of the significance of certain transition processes (24 items) and representation of transition processes (24 items). Respondents were asked to assess the significance of certain transition processes from kindergarten to primary school, i.e. how certain transition processes can contribute to an easier inclusion of children in primary school, their long-term achievements, and their personal participation in certain processes. The assessment was conducted on a 5-point Likert scale with a zero point, wherein 1= completely irrelevant and 5= extremely relevant. Participation in certain transition could be confirmed or denied.

The reliability of the instrument was determined by using the Cronbach's Alpha and it amounts to .86 for the entire instrument. It is exceptionally high for the assessment scale of the significance of transition processes (λ= .90) and somewhat lower for the participation in transition processes (λ= .81).

Results and Discussion

High homogeneity of the assessment scale of the significance of transition processes ($p<.01$) was determined by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy / KMO and Bartlett's Test, which is a prerequisite for the factor analysis. Six factors were singled out, which together make up for 65.20% of the variance. Following an analysis of the factor saturation and correlation matrix (Table 3), it is possible to single out factors such as: information (31.60% variance explanation), learning (8.49%), support (8.09%), cooperation (6.99%), parental involvement (5.56%) and assessment of the children's status (4.47%).

Table 3

Correlation matrix

	Extraction	Component					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Conversations with children about primary school	.63	.48	.08	-.38	.45	.16	.12
Conversations with children about their feelings on starting primary school	.74	.51	-.05	-.39	.40	.32	.21
Kindergarten children's visits to primary school	.79	.56	-.04	.15	.16	.53	-.39
School children's visits to kindergarten	.70	.62	-.33	-.13	.16	.35	-.19
School teacher's visits to kindergarten	.51	.67	-.06	.14	.18	.07	-.05
Children's organized research on school	.78	.41	-.19	.53	.89	-.37	.00
Parents and children's research on school	.79	.42	-.20	.54	.45	-.28	-.05
Use of parents' experience on their inclusion in primary school	.60	.61	-.19	.24	.32	-.01	.16
Organization of the "help of an older friend" process	.62	.62	-.22	-.14	.05	-.03	.41

	Extraction	Component					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Individual assessment of children's psychophysical status for school	.58	.30	.64	.11	.03	.12	.22
Individual work with children	.64	.45	.56	.25	-.12	.18	-.08
Experiential workshops for parents on the preparation for the inclusion in primary school	.63	.52	.27	.39	-.36	-.01	-.04
Information exchange between experts	.57	.59	.37	-.02	.12	.04	.24
Joint events of kindergarten and primary school children	.67	.53	-.16	.35	-.38	.26	.16
Joint learning of kindergarten and school children	.79	.62	-.36	.22	-.41	.16	.18
Exchange of learning contents on the same project – kindergarten children present school children with what they have learned	.58	.58	-.36	.01	-.29	-.12	.06
Children's ceremonies	.60	.50	.01	-.03	.12	-.11	-.56
Use of development maps	.56	.63	.07	-.37	-.15	.07	-.02
Regular informative conversations with parents	.61	.50	.35	-.23	.08	-.41	-.06
Joint studying of children and parents	.59	.68	-.06	-.08	-.25	-.20	.15
"Travelling notebooks"	.62	.57	.04	-.39	-.05	-.35	-.00
Student-readers for children	.75	.72	-.22	-.26	-.22	-.21	-.11
Teacher-readers for children	.66	.66	.06	-.25	-.23	-.12	-.29

If one analyses the transition processes which can facilitate children's inclusion in primary school according to the significance of research participants (entire sample), it is possible to classify them as (ranked data):

a) Informative activities:
- Conversations with children about their feelings on starting primary school (M=4.46; SD=0.67)
- Information exchange between professionals – kindergarten teachers, school teachers, and professional associates (M=4.41, SD=0.68)
- Conversations with children about primary school (M=4.38; SD=0.65)
- Informative conversations with parents (M=4.38; SD=0.76)
- Lectures for parents on children's inclusion in school (M=4.18; SD=0.86)
- Kindergarten children's visits to primary school in order to get acquainted with school (M=4.12; SD=0.77)
- "Travelling notebooks" (M=3.91; SD=1.02)

b) Assessment and monitoring of children's psychophysical status
– Individual assessment of children's psychophysical status for school (M=4.38; SD=0.74)
– Development maps as the outcome of preschool children's development monitoring (M=4.06; SD=0.97)
– Joint activities of preschool and school children
– Concluding ceremonies in kindergartens or welcome ceremonies in primary schools (M=4.25; SD=0.70)
– Visits and transfer of experiences from school children to preschool children (M=4.06; SD=0.73)
– Organization of the "help of an older friend" process (M=4.05; SD=0.89)
– Joint events in kindergartens and primary schools (M=3.88; SD=0.85)

c) Learning strategies
– Joint learning of children and parents (M=4.18; SD=0.81)
– Experiential workshops for parents on the preparation for the inclusion in primary school (M=3.97; SD=0.85)
– Teacher-readers for children (M=3.97; SD=0.85)
– Exchange of learning contents between preschool and school children on the same project (M=3.94; SD=0.78)
– Teachers' visits to kindergarten children (M=3.91; SD=0.85)
– Use of parents' experience on their inclusion in primary school (M=3.90; SD=0.87)
– Student-readers for children (M=3.88; SD=0.91)
– Joint projects of preschool and school children (M=3.79; SD=0.90)
– Parents and children's research, and the purpose and the history of the school (M=3.57; SD=0.90)
– Children's research on school (M=3.49; SD=0.90)

It is obvious that research participants assessed informative activities, assessment of children's psychophysical status and joint social activities as the most significant transition processes. It is worrying that research participants consider as the most important supporting activities the joint learning of children and parental involvement in learning strategies, which are at the same time the least organized transition process (Table 5). Joint social activities of kindergarten and primary schoolchildren – visits, exchange and transfer of experiences (for example, first-graders' visit to the educational group they participated in the previous year) – can contribute to the development of socio-emotional competences of all children. They can reduce the fear of the unknown in preschoolers, and strengthen the students' building of a positive identity. In this context, the concept of "an older friend" is particularly important as a networking process for children. It implies safety of the new community – someone at school (a peer) to whom you can turn for help can significantly facilitate the transition.

Following the assumption of differing professional experience, a statistically significant difference in the subsamples' assessment regarding institutions – kindergarten and primary school (Table 4) – was explored with the help of the t-test.

Table 4

Difference in the assessment of the importance of transition processes conducted with children according to subsamples

Transition processes	Institution	M	SD	t	p
Conversations with children about primary school (what takes place there, children's obligations...)	kindergarten primary school	4.34 4.44	0.63 0.66	-0.94	.34
Conversations with children about their feelings on starting primary school	kindergarten primary school	4.43 4.50	0.65 0.68	-0.67	.50
Kindergarten children's visits to primary school (in order to get acquainted with school)	kindergarten primary school	4.26 3.95	0.82 0.68	2.46	.02
School children's visits to kindergartens (to share their experiences with kindergarten children)	kindergarten primary school	4.18 3.92	0.79 0.64	2.11	.03
School teacher's visits to kindergarten	kindergarten primary school	4.10 3.68	0.83 0.82	3.02	.00
Children's organized research on school (the concept, purpose, the history of school…)	kindergarten primary school	3.59 3.36	0.83 0.97	1.49	.13
Organization of the "help of an older friend" process (when a kindergarten child meets a primary school child and can ask for their help once they start school)	kindergarten primary school	4.21 3.85	0.72 1.02	2.50	.02
Individual assessment of children's psychophysical status for school	kindergarten primary school	4.34 4.44	0.84 0.61	-0.84	.39
Individual work with children	kindergarten primary school	4.42 3.70	0.87 1.08	4.44	.00
Joint events of kindergarten and primary school children	kindergarten primary school	4.05 3.67	0.76 0.90	2.78	.00
Joint learning of kindergarten and school children (joint projects)	kindergarten primary school	3.99 3.56	0.86 0.89	2.92	.00
Exchange of learning contents on the same project – kindergarten children present school children with what they have learned	kindergarten primary school	3.98 3.89	0.77 0.78	0.62	.53
Children's ceremonies (concluding ceremonies in kindergartens or welcome ceremonies in primary schools)	kindergarten primary school	4.26 4.23	0.79 0.57	0.31	.75
Student-readers for children	kindergarten primary school	4.04 3.70	0.89 0.91	2.27	.02
Teacher-readers for children	kindergarten primary school	4.04 3.83	0.87 0.83	1.43	.15

A statistically significant difference ($p \leq .01$) in the research participants' assessment on the importance of transition processes conducted with children was established for the following processes: *School teacher's visits to kindergarten, Individual work with children, Joint events of kindergarten and primary schoolchildren* and *Joint learning of kindergarten and school children (joint projects)*. At the significance level of $p \leq .05$, the difference in the assessment of the importance of the following processes was

established: *Kindergarten children's visits to primary school (in order to get acquainted with school), School children's visits to kindergartens (to share their experiences with kindergarten children)*, and *Student-readers for kindergarten children.* It is interesting that professional workers in kindergartens assessed all transition processes as more important than did professional workers in primary schools.

Table 5

Difference in the assessment of the importance of transition processes conducted with parents

Transition processes	Institution	M	SD	t	p
Parents and children's research on school (the concept, purpose, the history of school…)	kindergarten primary school	3.60 3.53	0.83 0.98	0.45	.64
Use of parents' experience on their inclusion in primary school	kindergarten primary school	3.96 3.83	0.89 0.85	0.89	.37
Lectures for parents (on children's inclusion in school)	kindergarten primary school primary school	4.25 4.09 3.70	0.92 0.79 1.08	1.11	.26
Experiential workshops for parents on the preparation for inclusion in primary school	kindergarten primary school	4.14 3.77	0.82 0.85	2.61	.01
Regular (min. 3-4 times a year) informative conversations with parents	kindergarten primary school	4.36 4.41	0.78 0.74	-0.36	.71
Joint studying of parents and children	kindergarten primary school	4.29 4.06	0.75 0.87	1.68	.09
"Travelling notebooks" (written information exchanged by parents and professional workers)	kindergarten primary school	3.91 3.91	1.10 0.90	0.02	.98

A statistically significant difference ($p \leq .01$) between subsamples was observed only in the assessment of the importance of organized *experiential workshops for parents on the preparation for inclusion in primary school*. Professional workers in kindergartens assessed the workshops for parents higher than did professional workers in primary schools. Both subsamples equally assessed the importance of written information on children exchanged by parents and professional workers in kindergarten and primary school (M=3.91).

Table 6

Difference in the assessment of the importance of cooperation between teachers and parents

Transition Processes	Institution	M	SD	t	p
Lectures for parents (on children's inclusion in school)	kindergarten primary school	4.25 4.09	0.92 0.79	1.11	.26
Information exchange between professionals (kindergarten teachers, school teachers, and professional associates)	kindergarten primary school	4.53 4.27	0.67 0.66	2.25	.02
Use of development maps (creating them in kindergarten or using them in primary school)	kindergarten primary school	4.21 3.88	0.93 1.00	2.07	.04

A statistically significant (p≤.05) difference was determined in the assessment of the importance of *exchange of information on children between professional workers in the kindergarten and primary school* and the use of development maps as a form of documenting children's development. Professional workers in kindergarten consider both of these processes significantly more important than do professional workers in primary school. It is interesting that both of these processes are envisioned as a manner of determining the psychophysical status of the child (Guidance on the Process of Determining the Psychophysical Status of the Child, the Student and the Expert Commissions, 2014). These processes should be obligatory in primary school, but they are rarely applied in practice, except sporadically in smaller environments where professional workers know each other personally.

Participants were asked to express their personal involvement in certain transition processes in order to identify the frequency of implementation of certain transition procedures. By using the χ^2–test, a statistically significant difference was explored in the frequency of research participants' involvement in certain transition processes in relation to the employer (Table 4).

From the processed data (Table 7) it can be seen that professional workers in kindergartens are more involved in the organization and implementation of certain transition processes. For the majority of transition processes (f = 13), there is a statistically significant difference between professional workers in kindergartens and those in schools. A statistically significant difference (p≤.01) was established for the frequency of *Conversations with children about their feelings on starting primary school*, *Kindergarten children's visits to primary school (in order to get acquainted with school)* and *School children's visits to kindergarten (to share their experiences with children in kindergarten)*, *Organization of the "help of an older friend" process*, *individual work with children*, *Experimental workshops for parents*, *Children's ceremonies*, and *Use of development maps*. The difference in the frequency of participation in certain transition processes was established (p≤.05) for the following processes: *Conversations with children about primary school, Children's organized research on school, Lectures for parents*, *and Joint events of kindergarten and primary school children*. The aforementioned processes are organized and implemented by professional kindergarten workers almost twice as many times as by professional primary school workers. It was also noted that certain transition processes, such as the concept of "an older friend" (as a strong supportive activity), are yet to be organized in primary schools.

The discrepancy between the significance which all research participants attribute to certain transition processes and their actual participation is confusing. It is possible to conclude that professional workers are aware of the need for transition processes and their long-term benefits in regard to children, but that they follow the existing practice. Most commonly, they participate in the usual transition methods of questionable efficiency, while processes requiring systematic work, especially learning strategies, are not represented.

Table 7

Difference in the frequency of professional workers' participation in the implementation of transition processes in kindergarten and primary school

Transition processes	f and % participation*		χ	p
	Kindergarten	Primary school		
Conversations with children about primary school	62 42.5%	40 27.4%	4.90	.02
Conversations with children about their feelings on starting primary school	42 28.8%	20 13.7%	7.29	.00
Kindergarten children's visits to primary school	63 43.2%	36 24.7%	9.70	.00
School children's visits to kindergartens	21 14.4%	2 1.4%	14.69	.00
School teacher's visits to kindergarten	16 11%	7 4.8%	2.405	.12
Children's organized research on school	11 7.5%	2 1.4%	5.123	.02
Parents' and children's research on school	5 3.4%	1 0.7%	2.05	.15
Use of parents' experience on their inclusion in primary school	9 6.2%	6 4.1%	1.90	.36
Organization of the "help of an older friend" process	10 6.8%	0	8.85	.00
Lectures for parents	52 35.6%	29 19.9%	6.49	.01
Individual assessment of children's psychophysical status for school	25 17.1	16 11.0%	0.87	.34
Individual work with children	48 32.9%	13 8.9%	24.15	.00
Experiential workshops for parents on the preparation for inclusion in primary school	27 18.5%	6 4.1%	12.57	.00
Information exchange between experts	18 12.3%	13 8.9%	.17	.68
Joint events of kindergarten and primary school children	10 6.8%	2 1.4%	4.29	.03
Joint learning of kindergarten and school children	8 5.55%	6 4.16%	0.35	.55
Exchange of learning contents on the same project – kindergarten children present school children with what they have learned	1 0.7%	0	0.83	.36
Children's ceremonies	39 26.7%	15 10.3%	10.50	.00
Use of development maps (creating them in kindergarten or using them in primary school)	23 15.8%	4 2.7%	12.35	.00
Regular informative conversations with parents	21 14.4%	18 12.3%	0.01	.88
Joint studying of children and parents	4 2.7%	2 1.4%	0.35	.55
"Travelling notebooks"	1 0.7%	3 2.1%	1.47	.22
Student-readers for children	6 4.1%	0	5.16	.02
Teacher-readers for children	1 0.7%	3 2.1%	1.47	.22

* the percentage given refers to the entire sample

No statistically significant correlation was determined between the research participants' age (r=-0.07, p=.40) and length of professional experience (r=-0.09; p=.91), and the importance they attribute to certain transition processes. Using the one-way ANOVA test, the influence of the participants' level of education and occupation on the assessment of the significance of transition processes was explored (Table 6). Post hoc analysis, using the Bonferroni method, demonstrated a statistically significantly higher level of kindergarten teachers' assessment compared to school teachers and professional associates (p≤.01), as well as those with Master's degrees compared to participants with lower education (p≤.05).

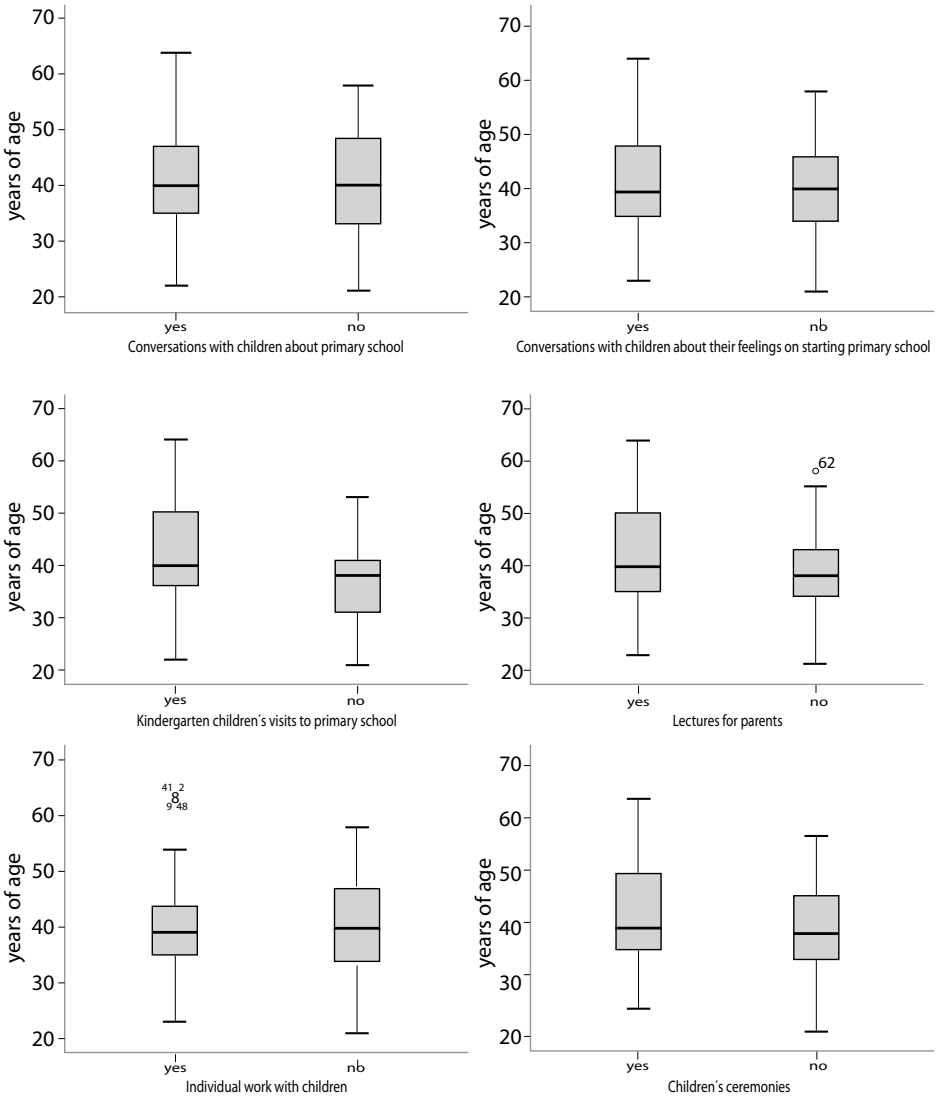
Table 8

Link between the respondents' level of education and the importance they attribute to transition processes

		Sum of squares	df	F	p
Level of education	Between Groups	54.81	41	1.76	.01
	Within Groups	78.19	103		
	Total	132.99	144		
Occupation	Between Groups	27.86	41	1.63	.02
	Within Groups	42.73	103		
	Total	70.59	144		

Boxplot analysis graphically presents the dispersion of participants' age in relation to participation in the transition processes (Chart 1-6). *Kindergarten children's visit to primary school, Lectures for parents*, and *Joint ceremonies* are represented by practitioners between 38 and 50 years of age. The said processes can be interpreted as common practice. *Individual work with children* is most often organized by practitioners between 35 to 45 years of age.

The research participants had the opportunity to generate and argue claims, which was used by only 13.01% of participants (N=19). Certain teachers (N=4) advocate a rigid attitude that kindergarten should be focused on the upbringing, while primary school should be focused on education. Therefore, following the claim of a participant (a teacher, 33 years of professional work experience in primary school), "*kindergartens should be directed toward the development of personality, social competences, and practical skills (for example, the ability to tie shoelaces), and leave the (pre)reading and writing skills to school*." The respondent argues such attitude by stating that "*children in kindergartens learn to write in an improper way*." Another teacher (30 years of professional work experience in primary school) interprets social competences as "*the obligation of kindergarten to teach children to comply with the rules of conduct*." Two teachers (25 and 31 years of professional work experience in primary school) point to the need for a common definition of rules of conduct, but they consider this to be the primary kindergarten task. School teachers generally prefer a normative assessment of the psychophysical status of children (all assessments go in the same direction). Nevertheless, one teacher (5 years of professional work experience



Figures 1-6. Dispersion of participants' age in relation to participation in transition processes

in primary school) emphasizes the importance of cooperation with professional workers in kindergarten without which there are no positive effects encouraging children's development. Kindergarten teachers (N=9) point to the need for *cooperation between educational institutions* (kindergarten and primary schools). They propose an exchange of experiences, information, and counselling on children (participants with 5, 33, and 40 years of professional work experience in kindergarten). They assess that development maps present a significant means of insight into the developmental status of an individual child, but that, unfortunately, school teachers are not interested in development maps created in the kindergarten (20, 22, 33, and 40 years of professional

work in a kindergarten). In analysing joint events of preschool and school children (22 and 39 years of professional work in a kindergarten), they emphasize that *events should not be organized for their own sake, but that they should result from the children's interest*.

The validity research was also determined by triangulation with recent global research. The result of a practice study on 36 kindergartens in two cities in Finland, conducted by Ahtola et al. (2011) concluded that the most common forms of work are the least effective ones – conversations about school and a one-time visit to school – as this research has confirmed. There is also a lack of systematic cooperation between kindergarten and school teachers – exchange of information, organization of joint activities (learning on joint projects, visits to exchange experiences), and parental involvement. This research established that the most important supporting transition processes in the educational practice (Bogard & Takanishi, 2005; Kagan & Kauerz, 2007; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008) are the least represented.

Einarsdottir et al. (2008) consider the information on children which school teachers obtain from kindergarten teachers as particularly valuable. Unfortunately, this study points to the extremely low frequency of such practices which would provide professional workers in primary schools with a comprehensive insight into children's development. For example, only 2.7% of teachers (f=4) use development maps created by kindergarten teachers as a form of documenting children's development. Certain kindergarten teachers, engaged in the building of partnerships, include children and parents in the creation of development maps (Visković & Radić, 2016). Einarsdottir et al. (2008) emphasize that school teachers who cooperate with kindergarten teachers take into account the information they receive on children. The negative attitude of kindergarten and school teachers toward parental involvement in the monitoring of the child's development can be interpreted as a result of insecurity and fear in view of parents' reaction (Ahtola, Björn, Turunen, Poikonen, Kontoniemi, Lerkkanen, & Nurmi, 2016; Einarsdottir et al., 2008). Research findings by Ahtola et al. (2016) point to the need of overcoming antagonism and involving parents in documenting children's development, or at least being informed on it. Regular information (cooperation in the educational process) would allow for the development of trust (Adams & Christenson, 2000). Providing information during a longer period of time as well as various yet regular forms of cooperation represent predictors of trust development (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Kikas, Poikonen, Kontoniemi, Lyyra, Lerkkanen, & Niilo, 2011). Obligatory information conducted 3-4 times a year is assessed as inadequate and ineffective, and as many different *satisfying contacts* as possible are recommended (Adams & Christenson, 2000). Unfortunately, this research did not determine the sufficient frequency of these processes – for example, only 14.4% of kindergarten teachers (f=21) and 12.3% of school teachers (f=18) regularly inform parents of their child's development and readiness to start primary school. Parental involvement in the curriculum creation, ensuring learning continuity, and enabling a specific transition experience are also missing (Bogard & Takanishi, 2005; Kagan & Kauers, 2007).

It is worrying that there is a lack of processes consisting in joint learning and project work of kindergarten and school children, as well as of children and parents. While scientific sources point out joint learning, process documenting, and early literacy as the most significant *supporting activities* (Einarsdottir et al., 2008), certain teachers disapprove of the encouragement of academic skills in preschool children, and consider the kindergarten to be an upbringing, not an educational community. At the same time, statutory regulation imposes a normative assessment of the psychophysical status and cognitive achievements of children. The focus on meeting school expectations and the development of cognitive skills, while neglecting the socio-emotional competences, is emphasized by researchers (Ahtola et al., 2016; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008) as one of the issues of the transition process.

When analysing the comprehensiveness of the process and the quality of adjustment processes, the responsibility should not be attributed exclusively to kindergarten and school teachers. Conversely, the cooperation should include entire institutions. Principals should also function as initiators, process coordinators, and professional guides, as well as professional associates (pedagogues, psychologists) in institutions should. Joint systematic action would contribute to mutual trust as a predictor of cooperation (Kikas, Poikonen, Kontoniemi, Lyyra, Lerkkanen, & Niilo, 2011). Joint events, mainly research projects and joint play, apart from being relevant to the development of children's competences, contribute to the building of mutual trust, socially acceptable behaviour, communication, and the adoption of problem-solving and power-sharing techniques. Unfortunately, certain researchers believe that quality practice is more talked about than it is recognized and applied (Einarsdottir et al., 2008; Nelson, 2004; Rous et al., 2010). Quality practice can be identified at the level of individual educational groups, which are primarily linked with high motivation and teacher engagement (Dozza & Cavrinio, 2012; Fairchild, 2012; Ljubetić et al., 2014; Whalley, 2011), and certain "passion toward work" (Brock, 2006).

As one issue in the implementation of transition processes, it is possible to single out the exaggerated focus of school on expectations instead on the process, quality of education, and development of quality practice (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). Emphasizing school preparation as the focus on the development of cognitive skills and adopting normatively defined content often leads to neglect of socio-emotional competences. Although the positive effects of such programme orientation on learning contents are visible in normative assessments of the child's psychophysical status, upon inclusion in the formal education, these effects are lost. Simultaneously, the demand for normative knowledge can be a stressor, and instigate the development of anxiety in children and parents.

Conclusion

Although recent global longitudinal research points to the correlation of early educational experiences with the academic achievements of the individual, there

is no available research on the transition processes in Croatia. Unfortunately, the findings of this research indicate the inadequate practice of the transition processes implementation, partial lack of understanding of transition processes, inadequate parental involvement, and the lack of cooperation between professional workers in kindergartens and primary schools. The practitioners' tendency to organize and implement the least effective transition processes – informing of children and parents about school – was observed. Although these processes can help reduce the fear of the unknown, they are not sufficient or high-quality experience and successful early educational achievement. At the same time, the focus on the *scholarization* of kindergartens and the normative assessment of children's psychophysical status does not contribute to the quality of the transition.

Strategies for experiential and exploratory learning of children and parental involvement in joint learning are significant supporting activities which can contribute to children's long-term academic achievement. A kind of networking of children from kindergarten and primary school–processes of joint learning, dissemination of knowledge and experience, and social accessibility (the concept of "an older friend"), are significant supporting activities which contribute to the strengthening of child's confidence, self-esteem, and the development of social competences. Systematic encouragement, monitoring, and documentation of children's development, which, apart from practitioners, can also involve parents and children, contribute to a better understanding of children. Unfortunately, these processes are rarely recognized in practice.

When considering the significance of transition processes from kindergarten to primary school as a long-term benefit to children, it is reasonable to conclude that they are the responsibility of all process participants – of professional workers in kindergartens and schools, of parents, and of children. Although professional workers assess the majority of transition processes as significant, it is confusing that they do not apply them in practice. This may be the result of the rigid curricula, lack of initiative, and underdeveloped cooperative competences of practitioners. It is justified to assume that both parents and professional associates, due to the misunderstanding of contemporary pedagogical concepts, follow only the existing practice. This includes limiting the child's participation in their own upbringing and education.

This research, albeit not representative of the population of professional workers in kindergartens and primary schools in Croatia, points to the need for systematic curriculum development, professional training of practitioners and the need for parental involvement, as well as the acceptance of children as active participants in their own education.

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Postupci prijelaza iz dječjeg vrtića u osnovnu školu

Sažetak

Prijelaz iz dječjeg vrtića u osnovnu školu tumači se kao proces promjene odgojno-obrazovnog okruženja. Podrazumijeva promjene identiteta djece, odnosa dionika procesa, strategija i oblika učenja, konteksta i svrhovitosti dječje igre, promjenu uloge obitelji i, gotovo u pravilu, povećanje i intenziviranje zahtjeva prema djeci uz istodobno smanjenje dječje autonomije pri odlučivanju o dnevnim aktivnostima. Može doprinijeti razvoju samopouzdanja i početnim akademskim postignućima.

Ovaj rad daje pregled istraživanja mišljenja stručnih radnika u dječjem vrtiću i osnovnoj školi o postojećoj praksi organiziranih postupaka prijelaza i njihovoj značajnosti za djecu. Statistički značajna razlika ($p \leq ,05$) procjene sudionika utvrđena je za postupke posjeta djece, individualnog rada s djecom, zajedničkih događanja i pojedinih oblika suradnje. Razgovori s djecom o školi, posjeti djece iz dječjeg vrtića u osnovnu školu i predavanja za roditelje prepoznati su kao najčešće organizirani postupci prijelaza. Izostaje praćenje i dokumentiranje dječjeg razvoja i zajedničko učenje, što su najznačajnije potporne aktivnosti.

Ključne riječi: *formalno obrazovanje; otpornost na promjene; potporne aktivnosti; suradnja; zajednice odrastanja.*