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The Importance of Encouraging and Involving the Family in the Period of Children's Transition to Primary School²

Extended summary

The relevant research (Cowan & Cowan, 2009; Centre for Equity & Innovation in Early Childhood - CEIEC, 2008; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2017; UNICEF, 2012) has confirmed that children's readiness for school depends on, among other things, the quality of their familial environment, meaning that supportive parenting, combined with stimulative surroundings, represents a key factor of a successful transition to school life (UNICEF, 2012). In that regard, this transition expands parental and family functioning and moves the parent-child relationship into new areas (Krstić and Zuković, 2017; Polovina, 2009). This is confirmed by the research which points to the new family roles when transitioning to school life (Griebel & Niesel, 2012), and challenges faced by families when a child is moving into new surroundings (Aho-ta et al., 2011; Dockett & Perry, 2009; Giallo et al., 2010; Peters, 2010), family characteristics which largely determine a child's academic achievements (Cowan & Cowan, 2009; Peters, 2010; Pianta et al., 2001) as well as the influence of parents' and professionals' expectations when it comes to the process of transitioning into school life (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). In accordance with this, and taking into account new and different roles that family plays in a child's transition to school life, the aim of this paper is to determine the possibilities of empowering and actively including the family during this process. The paper lists the forms of support for a fam-

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ily in the midst of this transition – parent training, programmes for positive parenting (Peters, 2010; Public Health England, 2014), preventive-educational counseling, individual talks and some activity types that connect schools, family, and the community (Zuković, 2013). The goal of the previously listed forms of support is to prepare the family for their child starting school, as well as to strengthen the parents' role and competences in general, leading to a more efficient participation and activities in the context of transitioning to school life (Cowan & Cowan, 2009; Giallo et al., 2010; Hirst et al., 2011; Public Health England, 2014; Zuković, 2017). The paper also points to the importance of implementing early intervention programmes aimed at families with certain specificities and families from less encouraging environments.

With the aim of establishing and maintaining a continuous influence during the transition process, the importance of all parties involved in the process acting as partners is emphasised. This can be achieved by completing some of the following activities: preparatory programmes (integrated approach to promoting children's readiness in pre-school) (Public Health England, 2014), "transferring literate information" (individual educational plans and child portfolios) (Athola et al.; 2001), and changing certain tenets and principles which lead to creating partnerships (Klemenović, 2014; Pavlovski and Pavlović Breneselović, 2000). The paper highlights the importance of family members' active involvement, and provides examples of good practice: a transition team (which must include family members, usually with roles of team coordinators) (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2015); clubs (communities of parents and teachers) (Bulkeley & Fabiana, 2006); family-minded interventions, with an emphasis placed on house visits, family and monitoring (Ahtola et al., 2011; UNESCO, 1996).

The conclusion drawn is that a strong bond between family, educational institutions and the community should be the basis for a more efficient transition into school life, which requires synchronised actions at different levels, as well as building awareness regarding the benefits of including the family in the process. Different activities conducted at the institutional level should focus on empowering a family to play its part during this period, with a full acknowledgement of the family's capacities during the preparation of children for primary school. It is especially important to identify situations that require providing extra educational and advisory support for those families which do not manage to appropriately overcome the challenges brought on by a child's transition into school life.

Keywords: transition, school, family, parents' competences, partnership.

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