

EARLY YEARS TRANSITION PROGRAMME

TRANSITION FROM PRE-SCHOOL TO SCHOOL: EMPHASIZING EARLY LITERACY

The education of the child shall be directed to...
the development of the child's personality,
talents and mental and physical abilities
to their fullest potential.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)



COMMENTS AND REFLECTIONS BY RESEARCHERS FROM EIGHT EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

CHAPTER 9

Involvement of Parents

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9.1 Abstract

The subject of the discussion in this article is the parents' role in the learning process of their children. Having a closer look at the issue of cooperation between children and parents, it becomes obvious that it is a more complex problem than it may seem. The great majority of parents are much involved in their children's school activities providing support for learning and monitoring their progress (Bruce, 1997). Without securing appropriate educational support for the child at home, there is little chance that knowledge provided at school will have a lasting effect (Borich, 1988). It usually happens that children who regularly work at home with their parents are more likely to achieve success than those who do not have an opportunity of cooperation with adults. Those young learners who practice and revise material outside the classroom are often more creative in the classroom and they rarely have difficulties with performing homework (Fontana, 1995). Thus, parental support in education—at home and in the classroom—is vital to effective learning and discipline and can improve the social and emotional development of young learners.

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the classroom are often more creative in the classroom and they rarely have difficulties with performing homework (Fontana, 1995). Thus, parental support in education—at home and in the classroom—is vital to effective learning and discipline and can improve the social and emotional development of young learners.

The quality of the relationship between parents and children has an important role in building the child’s personality. Parents influence their children in many different ways and shape their characters. This influence may be either positive or negative depending on the characteristics of the family as each family is a distinct nucleus of interacting individuals unique in various needs and expectations (Seifert, 1987). That is why numerous factors need to be taken into consideration when thinking about parental engagement in the child’s cognitive, emotional and psychological development.

Among different factors influencing cooperation between children and adults in the family, parents’ beliefs concerning the methods of rearing have been shown to influence children’s performance in the classroom. Sigel (1985) argues that parents’ beliefs serve as a guideline to their activities with their children. Similarly, Bacon and Ashmore (1986) argue that if we want to understand parents’ interactions with their children we must understand their beliefs. Goodnow (1988) also suggests that parents’ beliefs are likely to function as general guidelines to parents’ orientation towards child rearing.

According to Maccoby and Martin (1983), there are four main **parenting styles** representing different beliefs towards the methods of rearing that can influence the final success of cooperation between children and their parents.

Parents	Responsive	Unresponsive
Demanding	Authoritative	Authoritarian
Undemanding	Indulgent	Uninvolved

Authoritative parents promote cooperation, are both demanding and responsive, set clear and consistent behavioural guidelines for children. They are flexible but firm, not usually as controlling, allowing the child to explore more freely, thus having them make their own decisions based on their own reasoning. These parents are more respectful and more able to encourage individual opinions from their children but retain the final authority for decisions. They may, for instance, ask their children if they need to be supported in learning English and try to reveal what kind of help is needed. What is more, they often offer their help without asking if it is necessary but if they realize that children are able to achieve good results themselves, they do not disturb them but only monitor learners in their own way to progress. Children from authoritative homes are more socially and instrumentally competent than those whose parents are non-authoritative.

On the contrary, authoritarian parents always try to be in control, boss their children and tell them exactly what to do and even when to do it. They are highly demanding and directive but unresponsive to children’s needs. Those **parents** don’t explain why they want their children to do a particular thing. If questioned about the reason, the parent would probably answer, “Because I said so.” **Authoritarian parents** believe in expecting a very high level of achievement and status from their children. They make the rules, expect unquestioned obedience from their children and punish misbehaviour. So there is no freedom for learners what to learn and how to learn and no chance for cooperation based on understanding of mutual needs and expectations. Finally, authoritarian parents want their children to be assertive as well as socially responsible, and self-regulated as well as cooperative (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62). Children

from authoritarian homes tend to perform moderately well in school, but they have poorer social skills, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of depression than those from authoritative families.

Indulgent parents (also referred to as ‘permissive’ or ‘nondirective’) are responsive but undemanding and permissive. They do not require children to regulate themselves or behave appropriately, allow considerable self-regulation, and avoid confrontation (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62). Thus indulgent parents raise unhappy children who lack self-control. Such children perform less well in school, but they have higher self-esteem, better social skills, and lower levels of depression.

Most **uninvolved (neglectful)** parents are often indifferent in their behaviour toward their children. They are undemanding, permissive and set few clear boundaries and therefore are unable to encourage, teach or support their children’s learning. As these parents often lack the necessary social skills to maintain relationships, in extreme cases, they might encompass both rejection and disregard. Children whose parents are uninvolved perform most poorly in all domains.

The four above mentioned parental styles are closely connected with different rearing methods which influence children’s cognitive, emotional and social development. According to Pramling (1998), whose view is different from the common belief that only school should educate children, parents are mainly responsible for a child’s upbringing and development. The pre- and primary school should only support the home by creating appropriate and effective strategies for a child’s development. The school’s work with children should, thus, take place in close and active cooperation with the home. This cooperation may have an additional positive impact on the process of learning and teaching. And that is why parents should have a good relationship with the school staff. They both should contribute to the child’s well-being, development and learning and they should also take an active part in planning, carrying out and assessing the activities.

9.2 The positive effect of a good partnership

The positive effect of a good partnership (inclusion of parents in kindergarten life) is part of everyday life:

- Parents can observe their child in the community, they may transfer the most appropriate methods.
- They have a better understanding of the educational process, of the age characteristics of children and they can get acquainted with individual development features.
- They may witness good practices of dealing with children and of collective plays.
- They can follow the methods of kindergarten educators and enlarge their educational capacities.

The parents gain experiences with the development of children coming from different family environments. Their family centered views, their sense of responsibility and the awareness of the indispensable role of family education can be reinforced. It’s a pity that not enough attention is paid to all these activities and sometimes the emphasis is not strong enough. This needs to change.

9.2.1 Differentiated communication with families

Differentiation means building a partnership considering the needs, values and structures of the families and of the educational traditions, the ways of lives and activities of parents. Kindergarten educators knowing the children should convince the parents in the course of their cooperation in which area their child needs special, more intensive development to become mature for schooling.

9.2.2 Communication adapted to family structure

Cooperation needs an appropriate partner from among the family members. The kindergarten educator should value who has the utmost authority in the family, who represents the main resource. A single mother, if she has a job, can hardly meet the kindergarten educator. A grandmother replacing her can be a partner. The situation can be similar in the case of a multi-generational family. There are families where the mother, in others where the father has the stronger role. In such cases it might be most efficient to cooperate with the parent having the stronger authority however excluding the other parent completely can in no way be the right solution.

9.2.3 Parents meeting, open day, family room... there is a rich variety of building up contact in the kindergartens

The general pedagogical issues concern first of all the specifics of age. But given that beside age similarities there are many individual differences, this is not enough information for the parents. Parents can be partners in the education when they get support in solving the problems connected to their children and when the educator asks their contributing help.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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