

PRACTICAL WAYS FOR PREPARING CHILDREN FOR OPTIMAL ADAPTATION TO SCHOOL ACTIVITY

Evelina BALAŞ, Ph.D.
„Aurel Vlaicu” University of Arad
evelinabalas@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The preparatory class has the role of facilitating the child's adaptation to the new conditions and requirements and facilitating its good integration into the classroom and the school and the education process. Difficulties in adapting and integrating may lead over time to an inadequate attitude towards school, considering it to be either too lenient or too severe, and then other serious consequences occur: absenteeism and school dropout. In this regard, we intend to highlight the most frequent and important adaptation difficulties faced by teachers for primary education, as well as to find new ways to facilitate the children's transition from the kindergarten environment to the school environment.*

Keywords: *adaptation; preparatory class; difficulties.*

Introduction

Upon entering the school, the child acquires a new sense of belonging: belonging to a well-defined group, the school, often very different to other similar groups by uniform or other distinct signs specific to each school. The basic activity of the child changes: if during the pre-school period the main activity was playing, during the school period the main activity becomes learning. In addition, this type of activity allows immediate rewarding of the child's activity and the performances obtained through ratings and grades. It also develops the spirit of competitiveness, doing better than others, getting better grades, etc. For most children this process takes place naturally without major problems of adapting to the new program, new location, new colleagues or new teachers. But the achievement of the new status may also be accompanied by certain adaptation problems which, if observed and detected in time, can be diminished and even eliminated. The kindergarten schedule was easier - now they have a much more rigorous program. Directed and organized activities took place for a shorter period of time (about 20 minutes or half an hour) now they are being extended to 45-50 minutes, which requires the child to maintain the same position or to pay attention through the entire duration of the activity. In order for all these new aspects not to disturb the good integration of the new pupil into the school, the ability to adapt must be increased. The more a child is adaptable to new situations, the easier it will be to successfully cope with a new environment and to integrate quickly and smoothly.

The theoretical framework

In order to be fit to enter school, the child is firstly assessed and evaluated from the point of view of physical development: it must have a certain weight, a certain height, it must have a certain degree of development of general and fine motricity, as well and good coordination of movements. We have not thought of making a review of the physical development aspects of children, but of putting more emphasis on mental and social development. Psycho-pedagogical diagnosis attempts to highlight the level of educational maturity of the child, a level that is made up of two sides: intellectual maturity and social

maturity (Maciuc, 2016; Vrasmas, 2014).

One of the conditions related to the psychic field is the degree of educational maturity, which is considered as the child's intellectual development level at which school activity can fully contribute to its further development as a well-defined personality (Cristea, 2016). Researchers in this field (Cristea 2009, Gherguț, 2011, Munteanu, 2009) consider that this maturity is reached around the age of 6-7 years, which is why this age was chosen as the age of school admission.

It should not be forgotten that this level of intellectual maturity is influenced, in addition to the genetic potential, by the factors of the socio-cultural environment in which the child lives and develops. The family, which plays a primal role in child development, can ease, facilitate, and instigate this development in those cases where parents are mindful about the child, carry out activities together, and respond to all of the child's questions (Cerghit et al., 2001). On the contrary, there are families that can negatively influence this level of development because they do not care much for children, do not engage in any kind of common activities, and generally do not answer the questions they raise.

Children accumulate the knowledge through the answers and explanations they receive on the questions they ask, and the parents' refusal to communicate with the child can lead not only to a baggage of poorer knowledge, lesser developed language, but also to the child's interiorization and retreat in an imaginary world where he/she feels safe (Bontaș, 2008; Stan, 2016, Dughi, 2018). These issues will greatly harm his/her subsequent integration into school activity because knowledge and language are reduced compared to that of other children, and isolation tendencies do not help him/her build friends and adapt to the classroom.

Social maturity - has a much broader sphere, and in its assessment it is necessary to carefully observe the child in the environment in which he/she carries out his basic activity (Stan, 2016, Macavei, 2001, Bălaș-Timar, 2017). In our case the basic activity is the game, so the observation will be done in the kindergarten environment. The longitudinal observation of the child during the kindergarten, with the help of the psycho-pedagogical and development sheets, will highlight whether the level of development of the child in this direction is within normal limits or deviates from them (Roman, 2018, Nițulescu, 2013). We are first and foremost concerned with the child's ability to establish collective relationships with other children, to establish relationships with authority (which in our case is the pre-school teacher), team work, to adhere to the rules of the group set by mutual agreement at the beginning of the year, etc. All these aspects can provide us with useful information about the child's social adaptability, i.e. his ability to create new relationships, to observe new rules, to relate to other people in relation to authority. In a school of diversity, education must emphasize not only the sharing of new models of socialization and perception of one's own, but also the acceptance of different ways of life, situations, views, etc. (Ignat, 2017)

Hypothesis and objectives

The research has been one of a qualitative type and has started from the following assumptions:

H1: *the use of specific methods in the activities of the group of preschool children leads to an enrichment of the language and an improvement of the communicational capacity*

H2: *enriching language leads to better adaptation of the pre-school children in the school environment*

Following the formulation of the hypothesis, the following objectives emerged:

- the choice of methods of assessing the level of language development for pre-school children
- selecting the specific methods that will be used to improve the adaptability of preschool

children to the school environment

- identifying the most frequent difficulties in adapting preschool children to school
- determining the sample on which the actual research will be carried out.

A group of 17 children from the senior kindergarten year was studied.

Methods used

a) *methods for evaluating the level of language.* Several tests were used for different aspects of the language for which points were awarded according to the number of items correctly solved. A *short answer test* was used which consisted in adding a word to a sentence in order to make sense. The *multiple choice trial* - which consists of counting the words in a sentence; children had to draw a line for each word in the sentence. The *association test* - in which children were given multiple pictures of different stories, and they had to unite with a line the images that were part of the same story. The *filling test* - Children were read a text from a known story that lacked some of the words and they had to say the words that filled the story. Language evaluation trials were used to test the first hypothesis, that the methods used by us lead to the development of language and were applied in the initial testing

b) *methods used for language development.* For the development of the pre-school children's language, kindergarten-specific methods were used, especially the didactic game: dramatization games, correct pronunciation, story-telling, or image-based games were adapted to the learning units of the second semester. In addition to those, for the development of the other skills needed for a good school integration, other types of games involving teamwork or roles-play (shop, school, etc.) were organized. We also organized a contest *Who knows wins* to stimulate children's team spirit and competitiveness.

c) *methods used to collect data in the pre-experimental phase.* A Likert scale was built for a number of 7 adaptation difficulties, then asking the 10 teachers with whom we collaborated to give a score of 1 to 5 according to the frequency of these difficulties: 1 = very rare, 2 = rare, 3 = medium, 4 = often, 5 = very often.

Results and discussions

A number of 10 teachers from the preparatory class were asked to assess on a Likert scale the frequency of children's difficulty in adapting to the school environment. The scale was the following (table no.1):

Tabel nr. 1

Scala Likert utilizată pentru colectarea datelor

	Dificultăți	1	2	3	4	5
a	does not sit at the desk					
b	speaks over others					
c	does not pay attention to the class					
d	does not get along with colleagues					
e	has speech difficulties					
f	does not perform the required tasks					
g	speaks naughty					

The figure below shows that the most common difficulty is that almost all children talk to each other and do not know how to wait their turn. This may be due either to the fact that they are afraid of forgetting what they have in mind and want to respond immediately, or

they want to be the one to answer all questions, in order to draw the teacher's attention and his favorable appreciation.

In the second place as a difficulty is the inability of children to keep their place in the chair or in the desk for a longer time. They always get up, walk through the classroom, or go to other colleagues to see what they do or talk to them. Let's not forget that in the kindergarten, sitting in place for a longer time is not required, the children can sit on the carpet, and it is not a problem to walk through the classroom or to interact with the others. At school, however, the discipline rules are different and children have difficulty understanding and respecting them at first.

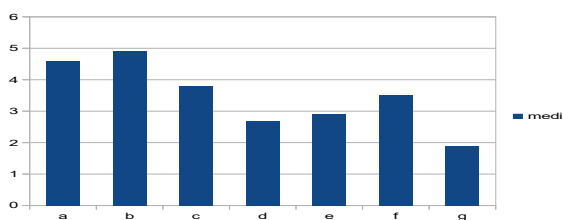


Figura 1. The results obtained after filling the Likert scale by the teachers of the preparatory classes

In third place we have the distraction during classes. Many children cannot pay attention during the whole class, even if classes are only 45 minutes long. They cannot concentrate for more than 15-20 minutes, and then they are bored of always discussing the same theme and looking for something else to attract them. That is why the activity in the preparatory class must take into account the psychic possibilities of the children, but also the attractiveness with which the material is presented. The child can keep his attention awake for a long time if he is always presented with something new, something interesting, something he has never seen before.

In the middle, to our surprise, it was the fact that they did not fulfill the required tasks. We say to our surprise, because some kind of tasks are required even in the kindergarten, so children should be accustomed to this procedure and be able to execute it. We can explain this, however, by dealing with children who have rarely attended the kindergarten, or with children who have difficulties in completing their tasks at the level of the kindergarten. Spoiled children who are allowed to do anything and who do not perform any kind of task at home within the family will have more difficulty doing something when they are asked because they are not accustomed to it.

In the fifth place we found the difficulty of speaking. Unfortunately, even at this age there are children who have various speech difficulties and who have not been taken to a speech therapist in time when the child was in the kindergarten. It is also the fault of the parents who either consider their child perfect or are unwilling to accept that their son or daughter would need a speech therapist because they are neither ill nor with intellectual disabilities. It is a misguided opinion that still persists in our society and deprives the child of the help of a specialist in that field. But if at the age of the kindergarten these difficulties still seem "cute", at the school age they can be an impediment to the integration of the child into the classroom. The other children may laugh at him and may joke about the speech difficulties he/she has, which may cause inferiority complexes to the child in question.

The 6th place is taken by the difficulties resulting from the fact that he/she does not get along with their colleagues. This is easy to understand, because not all of their current colleagues were with them in kindergarten, so they represent new people with whom they need to establish new contacts and with whom they have to get used. Even if they were

kindergarten colleagues, there may be misunderstandings among the children, in the desire to faster attract the teacher's attention or the desire to compete, to be among the first in the classroom.

Finally, in the last place we find the naughty talk, which is a gratifying fact and demonstrates that the kindergarten has managed to teach children how to control their vocabulary and how to express themselves in their relationships with others. Even if some children hear at home some naughty words, they have been taught in kindergarten their negative social significance and do not use them in their relationships with colleagues.

Comparative assessment initial-final testing

To further demonstrate the validation of our hypothesis in practice, we will present the following comparative assessment of both the initial and the final tests.

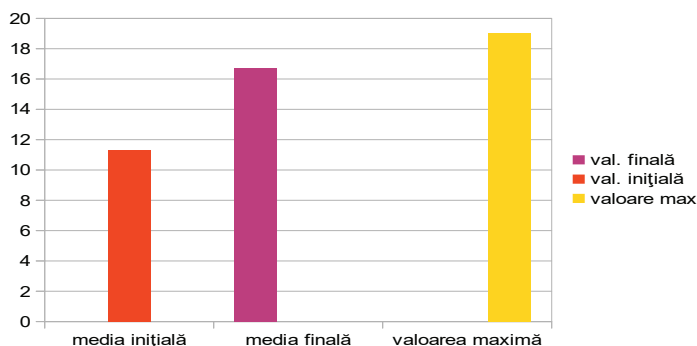


Figura 2. Total average and maximum value compared to initial and final evaluation

We note that if at the initial assessment the values were close to half the maximum value, slightly above the average of 11.32, at the final assessment we obtained values closest to the maximum value i.e. an average of 16.74 compared to the maximum value 19. This shows that in the final testing, improvements were made in all the test used for the assessment of children and that these improvements are largely due to the methods used during the second semester of our work in the group.

Appropriate choice of the didactic games and their selection according to the specific objective pursued is essential in achieving the desired results in the training and education of children. We also believe that the frequency with which these games are repeated over the course of a week is also important in order to develop the right skills to learn and assimilate knowledge. Forming these skills in a correct, error-free way will be essential in adapting the child to the learning activity that takes place in the primary school.

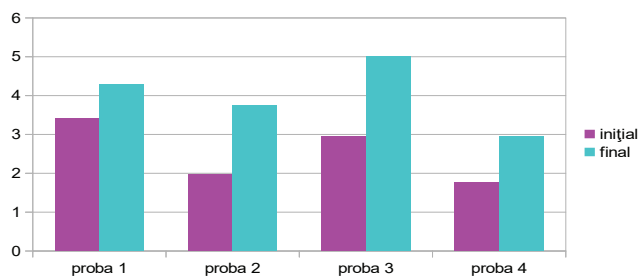


Figura 3. Comparative averages obtained by our group in the four tests used in the initial and final evaluation

For the short-answer task, the average of the group increases from 3.42 in the initial

test to 4.29 in the final test. The difference is statistically significant at a significance threshold of $p < .02$. Children have, through the use of didactic games, made it easier to establish links between objects, phenomena or animals and their characteristics. In addition, they have deepened the knowledge of these features and fixed them better so that when a response of this kind is required it can be promptly provided.

In the multiple-response test, the averages increase from the initial to the final evaluation from 1.98 to 3.74, also statistically significant at a significance threshold of $p < .01$. Children have acquired dexterity in mentally counting the number of words in sentences, even if sometimes they also use help with their fingers to make sure the countdown is correct. Being accustomed to sentences of varying lengths, children are able to respond faster and more accurately because of the exercise they have in this direction. We have found that up to six to seven word sentences, the counting is quite easy and the precision is good. The association test also records an average increase from 2.94 in the initial test, to 5.01 in the final test. This increase tells us that children have gradually become more attentive to reading, have focus on the elements of the story, and no longer confuse the characters and the stories they come from. As the maximum value for this sample can be 6, we consider it a significant breakthrough by children whose performance is close to the maximum. And here also the differences between the two averages are statistically significant at a significance threshold of $p < .01$.

Finally, in the last task, the filling test, the scores are considerably better, 1.76 on the first test, and 2.94 on the second, when the maximum value is 3. This demonstrates once again what we said in the previous paragraph, namely that the members of our test group managed to focus on the story and to better retain the essentials of that story. By gaining a better knowledge of the text, it is much easier to fill in the missing words when it is presented to you again. The attractiveness of the proposed didactic games for better understanding of the story has yielded the expected results, with children achieving performance at this test that is close to the maximum. Here too, the difference between the two tests is statistically significant at a threshold of $p < .01$. As it is clear from the previous text, all differences between averages were statistically significant at a significance threshold of $p < .01$ (see figure 3.13).

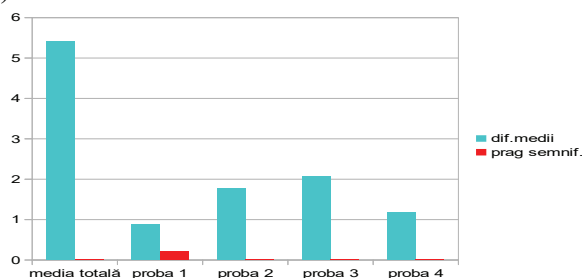


Figura 4. The significance of the difference between the averages

of the two evaluations

The comparative results between the first and the second assessment are clear evidence of the effectiveness of the methods used by us and the enrichment of the children's language in the research group. This demonstrates that our first hypothesis has been validated in practice by the results obtained by the children in the two evaluations.

Assessment of adaptation difficulties

To test the second hypotheses that *enriching language leads to a better adaptation of preschool child to the school environment*, it was necessary to expect that the subjects in our test group to enter the school environment and to let pass two months after the beginning of

the school semester so that teachers in the primary education had the time to identify any difficulties in adapting to the school environment.

Most of the children in this study have enrolled in the preparatory class of the school in which the kindergarten also functions. This made it easier for us to keep track of their progress during the first part of the semester and to keep in touch with the teacher who guided them. We asked the primary school teacher to make an assessment on the Likert ladder mentioned at the beginning of our research, on the main difficulties of adaptation that have occurred and the frequency of their occurrence. From the data analysis, it can be noticed that only three of the difficulties still arise with the children who were included in the research, namely: they do not sit at the desk, they speak over others and they are not paying attention to the class.

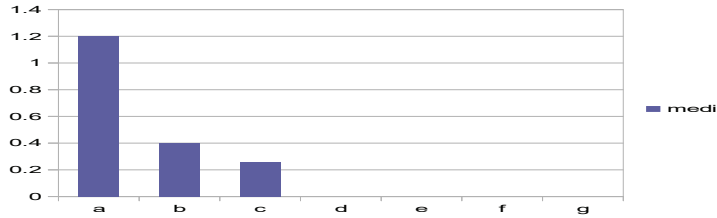


Figura 5. The results obtained for our test group after filling the Likert scale by the primary school teacher

There is still as a problem of adaptation the fact that the new students fail to stay in their place in the desk. It is the difficulty that occurs with the highest average of 1.20 compared to the others. However, its frequency of manifestation is low. We must not forget that at kindergarten children are encouraged to have initiative, to move, to interact with others. For them, going to the colleague's bench to talk to him, or going to the window to look how it's raining is not a violation of discipline. That's how they did before and they got used to in the kindergarten for three years, and there, that did not represent a violation of a rule. However, the exercises made through the didactic game, and especially the school-play, led to a significant reduction of these manifestations compared to what did the teachers pointed out in the pre-experimental stage.

A second problem in terms of size and frequency is that it they tend to speak over other children during classes. It's hard and we assume it's difficult for children to understand why some things were good up to a point and suddenly they are not. This is what happens with such rules. In kindergarten, it is good to interact and talk to other children and even encourage them to express themselves freely, to expose and support their ideas, and then in primary school this is no longer considered right, but is considered a violation of new rules. Switching from kindergarten to school should focus not only on the knowledge and skills of children, but also on the rules that were right before and are no longer so. Children need to understand why these rules are no longer right and why they have to adopt a different behavior than they had before.

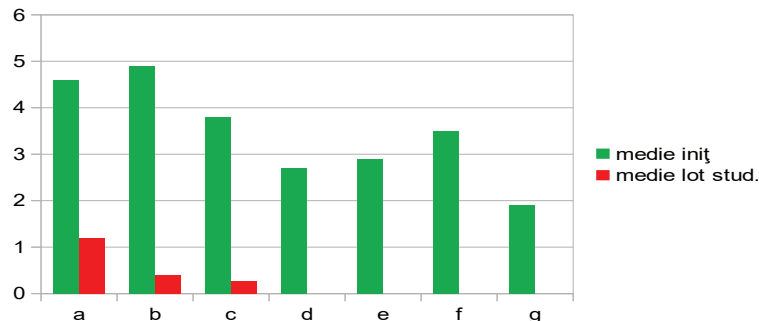


Figura 6. The comparative situation between values and frequencies teachers found in the pre-experimental stage and what was achieved with the children in our group

The desire to affirm themselves, which we have already mentioned in the analysis of the table and the pre-experimental graph, remains present in the children, which in this way attempts to self-indulge and gain a better position in the class hierarchy. Being at the beginning of the road, they do not understand that this hierarchy builds gradually on the basis of acquired knowledge, and not suddenly, based on how quickly you respond. There are many children in the primary school who raise their hands and shake it willing to answer, but when asked they do not know what to say or give the wrong answers. It can also be interpreted by the sense of the flock-spirit, to lift the hand in order to show that they also know the answer, simply because the others raise it. This type of reaction and influence of the others is kept throughout the primary school, but disappears once the children go through the gymnasium.

There is also in the last place in terms of value and frequency, the fact that they are not paying attention in class. Here, we believe, other factors intervene not only those who are strictly bound to inattentiveness and thus to indiscipline. As is well known, child development is not uniform, each child develops in its own style. In this sense, one can behave for a longer period of time, another can pay more attention to what he/she is told, and others cannot. We do not consider those as serious problems that should lead to categorize them as adaptation difficulties. We believe that there are developmental variations specific to children, and that we should wait for one year and then, if these problems persist, they should be included in a group with adaptation difficulties. The pace of children is different, a margin of about 6 months is acceptable at this age.

There are no longer signs of: misunderstandings with colleagues, failure to do the required tasks, speech problems and nasty talk as adaptation difficulties.

The exercises performed and the way of presenting the collegiate relationships increased the tolerance of children towards colleagues and thus significantly reduced the problems of not getting along between them. They have come to understand that every human, and therefore every child, is different, that they must be accepted as they are and that conflicts should not be reached if two people are different. We have put much emphasis on the fact that the opinions of others have to be respected if they want their own opinions to be respected. It has also been a great deal of work to learn to understand some differences between the socio-economic background and the awareness of the fact that a child who comes from a poorer environment does not necessarily mean that it is bad and should not be treated as such. This has led to the creation of a more empathetic attitude towards others and of understanding, of course, of the differences that may occur irrespective of the children's desire.

An important role in preparing the children in our group for the school was taken by the exercises which focused on the prompt and correct fulfillment of the required tasks. The children understood that the tasks of a game or an activity proposed by the educator must be fulfilled as requested and there is a need to the correctness and promptness of their fulfillment. This attitude was later transferred to the tasks that were required in the school environment. They reacted more promptly to their realization and endeavored to fulfill them as accurately as possible. It is very important that the tasks we ask for children are expressed in a clear and concise language so as to eliminate any factor that could lead to their misunderstanding and thus, to their failure.

Speech problems were not an adaptation difficulty for our group and this, we believe, was possible for two reasons. On the one hand, the real difficulty of pronouncing or speech defects could be corrected in time with the help of a specialist in the field, that is, a speech therapist. Our kindergarten benefits from the services of a speech therapist who deals with

early detection and correction of speech defects. We also had the full cooperation from the parents who accepted the speech therapy sessions, especially after explaining to them what negative effects these defects could have in the subsequent evolution of their child. In this way, due to proper cooperation between parents and specialists, the resulting speech defects could be remedied in a timely manner and the children did not suffer from them. On the other hand, weekly exercises of correct pronunciation have also played an important role in assimilating the correct pronunciation by the children and they made significant progress in this direction.

The naughty talk, the last of the issues that we analyze from the list made up by the teachers teaching primary school in the pre-experimental stage, was not reported as an adapting difficulty in to the children of our group. The games we used did not only aim at enhancing pronunciation and enriching language, but also learning and adopting correct conduct rules in dealing with others. Children have realized that talking badly with others is not a sign of power or wit, but instead a sign that you do not know how to behave in society. As a result of the exercises, which focused on civilized behavior in various situations, they came to give up this language and adopt a language appropriate to the game situation. In addition, the other children began to make observations and corrections of the nasty language used, so the feed-back was double: from the educator and from the children. Of course, it is difficult for the child to hear a colorful language at home and not to adopt some terms in the language used by him in kindergarten. But gradually over the semester we found a significant improvement in the quality of the content of the language and the gradual renunciation of inappropriate expressions.

The results presented by us and the comments made on them show that the second hypothesis formulated at the beginning of the research was also validated in practice: the development of language determines a better adaptation of children to the school environment.

Conclusions

In order to avoid the difficulties of adaptation, which later lead to a negative attitude towards school (absenteeism, school abandonment), the kindergarten has the role of making it possible for this adaptation to a new environment to be done as smoothly as possible and in a more natural fashion. Children have to come to school, to consider the school a place where they can learn a lot of new things and can do all sorts of exciting activities. They do not have to come to school from obligation, nor should they feel stressed by their colleagues' attitude or the too many tasks they have to fulfill. The work has started from this idea, to find new ways to facilitate the transition of children from the kindergarten environment to the school environment and, moreover, to make it smooth and natural, without involving an emotional trauma for children.

The study confirms that it is necessary for the kindergarten to be actively involved in the development of children's language, their ability to communicate ideas, feelings, opinions. This development will be seen during the preparatory class, when the difficulties of adapting children to the new environment represented by the school and its requirements will almost completely disappear. Consequently, it will also improve the view the children take on school and its activities, and therefore their attitudes towards school and learning.

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