

## OPTIMIZATION OF SCHOOL ADJUSTMENT BY STRENGTHENING THE SCHOOL-FAMILY EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

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**Abstract:** One of the periods in which frequent difficulties of school adaptation are registered is pre-adolescence, especially the beginning of pre-adolescence, which coincides in students with the passage from elementary to secondary school and which on the foundation of a fragile emotional and psychic balance as well as personality in formation, numerous adaptation behaviors are assimilated and long lasting behavioral patterns are formed, which will be transferred in future activities. Amid all these bio-physiological and mental transformations and changes, and the conditions related to the educational process, along with school, the family is the factor that should support students' efforts to adapt successfully to the new conditions. In an experimental investigation in which we sought to identify the difficulties pre-adolescents (5<sup>th</sup> grade students) face in adapting to the requirements of gymnasium. We have also aimed at elaborating and implementing some strategies to prevent/improve these difficulties. One of the study indicators focused on family involvement in school activities of the student, by improving communication and cooperation between parents and school. In this regard, we designed the socio-educational intervention program on "*Prevention of preadolescent school adaptation difficulties*" to develop educational practices and parenting skills, improve communication and cooperation between parents and teachers, by the child.

**Keywords:** school adjustment, educational partnership, school-family collaboration, pre-adolescents, optimization of educational parental practices

### **1. Pre-adolescents' school adjustment**

The problem of students' school adjustment is a fundamental aspect of the educational activity, being present in school life, the everyday concerns of teachers, but also in many national and international investigations. Research undertaken for this purpose is looking to identify the causes that can generate school adaptation difficulties, factors that promote school adjustment, school inadaptability forms and methods of prevention and mitigation of the school inadaptability phenomenon.

One way of defining school adjustment is by referring to it as a transforming process, a process of student behavior adjustment in line with the demands and exigencies of the educational-instructive process, so as to meet these adequately. On the other hand, school adjustment also presupposes altering, regulating, and adapting the educational-instructive process according to the potential, and psychological and individual student capabilities. The final goal of all these changes and adjustments

applied to both parts (at student level, as well as at the educational-instructive process level) is to reach a balance between the demands of the school and the response behavior of the students towards these, but also between the needs, the student's capabilities, and the way the educational-instructive process is suitable to all these (A. Coaşan, A. Vasilescu, 1988).

A second definition of school adjustment, which refers to the adjustment of the school, of the educational strategies and the entire educational-instructive process to the individual needs of the students, to their learning capabilities and particularities is one dimension of the post modern paradigm within the education system, characterized by: promotion of new education systems, curriculum reform, a personalized approach of strategies, using alternative sources of information, interdisciplinarity, ceasing to use traditional practices of transmitting knowledge, using a personal content instead of a pre-established content that reflects a subjective knowledge, using multiple means of instruction and teaching, placing the student, with its needs and capabilities at the center of the teaching process (L. Tăușan, Journal Plus Education, nr.1, 2011).

One of the periods in which frequent difficulties of school adaptation are registered is pre-adolescence, especially the beginning of pre-adolescence, which coincides in students with the passage from elementary to secondary school and which on the foundation of a fragile emotional and psychic balance as well as personality in formation, numerous adaptation behaviors are assimilated and long lasting behavioral patterns are formed, which will be transferred in future activities.

Secondary education is an integral part of basic education, whose importance is emphasized in international and national educational policy documents. It is an essential step in preparing for life, the child learns "how to learn" and is able to decide on the path that he/she will follow in the future, in which he/she forms and develops skills in the areas of oral and written language, mathematics, problem solving, science, communication, optimal integration in the sphere of work and in society as a whole. (L.Tăușan, Journal Plus Education, nr. 2, 2011)

School adjustment difficulties that may occur at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, may be caused by multiple and sometimes sudden changes that occur within the two sides: the bio-psycho-social development and the educational activity. The way in which the interaction between the physical, intellectual, emotional and personality of preteen, on the one hand, and the requirements and requirements imposed by educational activities and quality of family influences on school activity, on the other hand depend on the student's ability to adapt. Pre-adolescents' adaptation to new requirements posed by the changes suffered by him/her in the bio-psycho-social plan and some changes in the educational activity are prerequisites for achieving and maintaining a morpho-functional psychological, moral and social balance.

Once the student faces this transition, he/she faces numerous changes at the level of the instructive-educative activity, which are expressed by new demands and strains, the contact with more diversified human models and more diversified types of lessons, which, because of the bio-psychological transformations may generate difficulties in school adjustment.

## **2.The role of the family in optimization pre-adolescents' school adjustment**

Amid all these bio-physiological and mental transformations and changes, and the conditions related to the educational process, along with school, the family is the factor that should support students' efforts to adapt successfully to the new conditions. To achieve this support, it is recommended that the family (T. Cosma, 2001):

- do not dramatize the difficulties inherent in beginning the secondary school;
- work actively with the school to know and understand the requirements of the new school stage;
- develop a program with child labor and leisure in line with new requirements, taking into account the peculiarities of psycho-physiological and age-specific individual characteristics of the child;
- help the child when having difficulties without taking harsh measures against the first finding of unsatisfactory results and no more than necessary help in preparing lessons;
- not induce any inferiority feeling or belief that is superior to others, as this may hinder his/her integration into the team of students.

Active participation and direct life and school activities, providing models for action and behavior of children, ongoing cooperation with teachers in order to choose the best strategies for development and training of preadolescent children, working with other parents and sharing experiences are ways of action that can help reduce parents preteen difficulties specific to the onset of secondary education.

The family, the crucial educational environment, the most important context of life, which plays a very important role in child socialization, influences the attitudes and school performance by: family climate (cultural and emotional) that is within the family structure, degree of social integration and degree of collaboration with the school.

The family climate represents the functional expression of all the relations established between family members. The cultural climate of the family influences the student's academic performance, particularly by: the aspiration of parents, their attitude towards school and education, the cultural baggage itself (language use, cultural practices) and value system promoted by parents. Thus, the socio-cultural level of the family determines to a large extent: the child's attitude toward school, and taste for culture, wealth and accuracy of language, the aspirations of the child (which is usually directly proportional to the parents'), motivational level, the material conditions necessary for the assimilation of the culture (E. Paun, 1979).

Besides the cultural climate, the economic situation of the family has its impact on school achievement and mental development of the children. Available funds allow long-term education, providing the necessary study (comfort, books, supplies, taxes, etc.), while a precarious economic situation does not allow for paying tuition, employing in some cases

even stopping school. The family emotional climate is another variable, which can generate unfavorable inadaptability in school students. The cultural and emotional climates are usually closely connected. But there are situations where, despite favorable socio-cultural and intellectual capacities of the students, some mediocre

students achieve poor results or face school failure. In these cases, the causes must be sought in the emotional climate of the family, which is possibly not favorable.

Another family climate that can generate bad behavior is represented by the educational differences between the child's parents and other adult family members (grandparents). The differences in parental authority may break, causing tension and conflict. Parental inconsistency creates a climate of insecurity, incompatible with a good school adaptation, and the child will be permanently confused and inclined to adopt behavioral patterns outside the family. Excessive demands expressed by parents to their child, resulting in a demand for results beyond what they are taught in school, more overload (meditation), or overloading children with various other activities that will limit free time, can cause irritability, anger or even manifestation of opposition in relation to the school.

The family type affects the development and the evolution of the child, especially the formation of the character and moral-volitional traits: the initiative and determination in action, epistemic curiosity, spirit of self-purpose, dynamicity, self-confidence, work motivation, etc. R. Vincent (cf. A. Cosmovici, L. Iacob, 1998) distinguishes the following typological couples: family repressed (which stifles the spirit of independence of the child) and liberal families (which encourage child initiatives) socially integrated families (who have a high responsiveness to social changes) and family integration limit (who resist to everything that is new and feel socially insecure), active families (who fight difficulties, and impose themselves in the social environment) and passive families (who are indifferent, distrustful, pessimistic and get discouraged when facing obstacles).

Collaboration between the school and the family is another variable that influences students' school performance and progress as a relaxed atmosphere between the two educational agents, the existence of common rules, enhance the school learning effectiveness. Collaboration between school and family requires cooperation through communication, unification of the value system and unity of action (E. Vraşmaş, 2002). Establishment of direct relations between parents and teachers in order to know the requirements and demands of school is essential to support children to carry them out and to have permanent control over their school progress. Also collaborating of the school with the family is a prerequisite of an appropriate professional decision and this corresponds to the possibilities and interests of children.

### **3. Family involvement in the student's school activity – the results of some experimental investigations**

In an experimental investigation in which we sought to identify the difficulties pre-adolescents (5<sup>th</sup> grade students) face in adapting to the requirements of gymnasium. We have also aimed at elaborating and implementing some strategies to prevent/improve these difficulties. One of the study indicators focused on family involvement in school activities of the student, by improving communication and cooperation between parents and school.

To quantify the extent to which the family is involved in school activities and to identify how the student's cooperate with the school, we used a questionnaire as a tool for parents and a questionnaire for students.

The variables on which we developed the questions in the questionnaire for parents were: family involvement in school activities of children (knowledge of the new school requirements and demands and the difficulties the child faces, support in preparing lessons), parents' communication and cooperation with the school.

Regarding the variable on family involvement in school activities of children, we recorded the following results:

- 61.2% of parents say they only partially know the 5<sup>th</sup> grade specific requirements and only 16.3% of them claim that they fully know these. A fairly large percentage of parents are not aware of these requirements (22.4%) (Table 1)

- As the concern of parents to check the homework preparation, 46.9% say they do so only "sometimes", for 44.9% of them it is a daily concern, and only 8.2% say that "very rarely" control the child on how to prepare the homework;

- Communication of the parents with their children regarding their marks and other events, is achieved for 57.1% of the parents, "every day", for only 40.8% "sometimes", and 2% "rarely" ;

**Table no. 1: Family involvement in the school activities of children – do you know the new requirements and demands your child has to face in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade**

	frequent	%
yes	8	16,3
partially	30	<b>61,2</b>
no	11	22,4
Total	49	100,0

Analyzing the variable on parents' communication and cooperation with school, we recorded the following data:

- only 20.4% of parents consider it necessary to collaborate and communicate with the school "regularly", and 67.3% established this link, only occasionally, "when appropriate" (Table. no. 2).

- 42.9% of parents think that they need to communicate with the teachers only when the child has learning difficulties or behavioral manifestations and 44.9% of them said that only "sometimes" get in touch with the school in such situations. A percentage of 12.2% of parents say they do not go to school, do not get in touch with the head teacher or the class teachers, even if they meet such difficulties.

**Table 2: parents' communication and cooperation with the school - How do you keep in touch with the school?**

	frequent	%
periodically	10	20,4
When necessary	33	<b>67,3</b>
Very rarely	6	12,2
Total	49	100,0

With the help of the Questionnaire for students we have identified the students' perception regarding their family's involvement in their school activity and we have recorded the following data: 51% of students consider that the manifestation of concern of their parents to their school work is greater than in the fourth grade, while only 20.4% among students state that the degree of expression of interest of parents to their school development is lower than in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. For 28.6% of students there are no significant changes in terms of attention by parents in this school year from the (Table no. 3).

**Table 3: How do your parents treat you since you passed in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade?**

	Frequent	%
They are less interested.....	10	20,4
They are as interested as in the 4 <sup>th</sup> grade	14	28,6
They are more interested	25	<b>51,0</b>
Total	49	100,0

As a conclusion we consider it necessary to design educational activities aimed at supporting the family in performing its educational role and at contributing to the strengthening of the school-family partnership by improving communication and cooperation between parents and teachers.

#### **4. Conclusions, educational solutions**

Based on these findings, we found that family involvement in the school activities achieved through: knowledge requirements and specific requirements to the school grade, knowledge of student difficulties when beginning a new cycle, controlling the preparation of lessons in a systematic way, ongoing communication with the child, will help to optimize student's adaptation. On the other hand, we assumed that if parents adopt an appropriate educational style, based on age and individual peculiarities of the child, and developing effective communication practices and family interaction, problem solving situations, will contribute to a better normative and relational adaptation of the student.

In this regard, we designed the socio-educational intervention program on "*Prevention of preadolescent school adaptation difficulties*" to develop educational practices and parenting skills, improve communication and cooperation between parents and teachers, by the child.

In designing the program of prevention, we found out that school and family play an important role in preventing adaptation problems, but this can be achieved only by knowing them and coming to meet them, amid the ongoing cooperation with the school.

The program targets, as fields of socio-educational intervention, the educational processes in the family (parents' educational practices and attitudes), and relations between school and family as educational agents acting on children and is structured into seven meetings, each of two hours, one meeting/week.

The general objectives of the program are:

- Information and education of parents;
- Support parents in solving problems or difficulties related to child education by developing educational practices and parenting skills;
- Strengthening school-family partnership education, on the further communication and cooperation between parents and teachers to favour the child.

Among the particular objectives we may mention:

- Knowledge by parents of preadolescent age specific features and individual peculiarities of the child, to avoid the risk of ineffective educational benefits;
- Support parents in children's knowledge of activity, indicating the useful methods in this respect;
- Support parents in school life knowledge of the main difficulties of the child;
- Strengthening relationships between children and parents, through their involvement in the problems of school life;
- Knowing the best ways that parents can support the children in the preparation of homework;
- Identify recommended parental behavior in certain circumstances.

Among the topics discussed we may mention: the bio-psychological peculiarities of preadolescent period and desirable parental behaviors, how can we know the child?; Adaptation to the demands of secondary school, to the main changes that take place in schools, once the student gets into the 5th grade, how to help children in the preparation of homework, Special preadolescents (the naughty child, the only child, the angry child, the shy child).

In terms of methods and procedures used in conducting meetings we may include: discussing parental behavior in special situations in small groups, or face to face, finding solutions to education, analysis of the enlarged group settlement in small groups, exposure to information (exposure accompanied by video), lecture - discussion, critical incident technique (a situation is presented and group members express their opinions, attitudes to the situation presented), open discussions, debates on problem cases, brainstorming, questioning, conversation.

Evaluation will be carried out by assessing how the number of participants varies, observing the interest shown by participants, monitoring the school and social behavior of children, parent surveys among the program participants.

Educational partnerships, in our case the school-family partnership, is one of the principles of education and contemporary pedagogy, subsumed in the future education requirements. This is a form of communication and cooperation carried out with the child's support, involving a unity of requirements, options, decisions and actions between school and family education (E. Vrasmas, 2002).

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## 6. Annexes

Items we have used during our investigation, selected from the *Quiz for parents* and the *Quiz for students*:

1. Are you aware of your child's new school requirements this year of study?

Yes; Partially; No

2. How often do you check if your child has prepared the homework?

Daily; Sometimes; Very rarely

3. How frequent do you discuss with your child the marks he/she got and the most important events in the classroom/school?

Daily; Sometimes; Very rarely

4. How do you keep contact with the school?

Periodically; Only when necessary; Very rarely

5. Do you go to school when you notice any learning difficulties or behavioural problems?

Yes; Sometimes; No

6. How do your parents treat you since you entered the 5<sup>th</sup> grade?

They show less interest to my school situation, to the way I prepare my homework, to the difficulties I have to face in school as compared to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade;

They are as interested as they were in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade;

They show even more interest to my school situation, to the way I prepare my homework, to the difficulties I have to face in school as compared to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade;

Any other answer;

Do not Know/Do not want to answer.