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GIFTED CHILDREN AND THE TRANSITION FROM KINDERGARTEN TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

The transition from kindergarten to school is a very important period in the development of each individual child. Both parents and children in this process need support, especially gifted children, to make the most of their potential, not only for themselves but for the benefit of the entire society. According to the 2008 State Pedagogical Standards, gifted children and children with disabilities are categorized into a group of children with special needs. In the National Curriculum for Early Childhood and Pre-School Education as well as the National Curriculum Framework the emphasis is on children with special needs, which is often seen in practice where gifted children who need support, especially in socio-emotional development are "neglected". If we do not notice a child's gift and do not adjust the environment to his or her needs, the gifted child may experience frustrations affecting his behaviour in relation to children and adults. Adapting children, both in kindergarten and school, has long-term consequences for their cognitive and social development. The didactic-material preparation of kindergartens and schools as well as educators is an important factor in encouraging the development of gifted children. Transition of a child from kindergarten to school is related to various tasks that a child needs to overcome, which causes stress that manifests itself with strong emotions such as fear, insecurity, sadness. As a child now changes their role into a role of a student likewise their parents pass through various new roles, relationships and identities, they become pupils' parents. Understanding new roles needs and can be assisted by expert associates of kindergartens and schools. The planned and timely preparation for the transition from kindergarten to school must include work with the parents. Parents' positive attitudes about the school and their emotional support to the child are a prerequisite for good adaptation in the school environment. Besides that two - way communication between kindergartens and schools is necessary to harmonize the transition of a child from kindergarten to school. Common activities by kindergartens and schools help in obtaining timely information and support in adapting a child and their parent to a system that has a range of new obligations, rhythms and requirements. In order to meet the needs of gifted children, we all have to adapt our actions and activities in the transition process. The partnership between all of the factors involved is crucial for the transition to go smoothly and with a little stress. This paper will highlight the characteristics and the position of gifted children in the transition process itself, and will provide an insight into the National Curriculum Framework, legal regulation in the Republic of Croatia and cooperation between kindergartens, schools and families.

Keywords: family, gifted children, kindergarten, cooperation, transition to elementary school.

1 INTRODUCTION

Authors differently define the concept of giftedness. One of the definitions states that the giftedness is a set of features that an individual possesses and that enable him to achieve over-average results in one or more activities. Cvetković-Lay [7] defines the giftedness or talent as a set of inherent traits and abilities that allow the person to achieve significant overproduction results in one or more areas. It also lists the possibilities of expressing giftedness only in one area and then calls it a talent such as those in music, maths, sports, acting, etc. Each child develops special abilities and potentials, and the goal of the educational process is to encourage him in as many ways as possible. The proper identification is one of the first steps in planning incentives for gifted preschoolers and students in lower grades of elementary school. The difficulty in identifying gifted children is the lack of consensus for a unique definition of talent and the lack of technical-accurate testing instruments that would complement the IQ test, especially instruments designed in accordance with the developmental potential of a gifted child [28].

The contemporary approach to early and preschool education has a major impact on the development of children with a rich and stimulating environment that implies interestingness, diversity, challenges and performance standards. In addition, parental support is extremely important as well as the level of parental education. Namely, more educated parents have the ability and desire to provide the child with a stimulating environment. Better material conditions do not necessarily mean talent, but the enriched environment has the role of improving development, while the impoverished environment decreases [17]

The aim of early and pre-school education should be to promote and encourage the child to make decisions, solve problems, co-operate with peers as well as adults in their immediate and wider environment. Children who show signs of giftedness often possess these skills but they need a qualitatively different set of learning experiences. Cooper [9] states that small geniuses need curriculum enriched with incentives, support of well-educated teachers and educators who understand and encourage them in everyday activities and support the acquisition of new experiences. A child who has been recognized as a potentially gifted kindergarten in the school is more aware of his or her own abilities. Such a child is prepared to apply the acquired knowledge independently, has a more developed positive self-image, better tolerates peer differences and has the ability to improve his or her knowledge in the area that interests him most. It is also important to point out that a child who is recognized as potentially gifted in kindergarten often does not have continuity of incentives at early school age, or the child's gift is often ignored because of the obligation to execute a school program. Pedagogical practice shows that the number of gifted children decreases with the chronological age, and this can be recognized in the way of organizing the educational system [18]. The same authors find the explanation in the levels of the educational system (nursery, pre-school, classroom, subject teaching,...) in a way that the higher the level of the educational system is, the structure of work and social interaction are predetermined, so adults expect a higher level of similarity between one's own performances and the performance of a child or a student. In support of their own conclusions they cite Bruner [5], who states that pedagogy prevails in teaching mode.

Recent literature of gifted children in Croatia shows the lack of research of transition from pre-school to elementary school education system, so this paper will contribute to this topic.

2 NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK AND LEGISLATIVE REGULATIONS

The National Curriculum for Early and Pre-School Education begins with the understanding of the child as a creative being with specific creative and expressive potentials. The aim of the National Curriculum for Early and Pre-School Education is to encourage the full development of the child, to encourage him to learn and develop its competences. In addition, it is important to encourage the initiative and entrepreneurship of an individual during everyday activities, which is manifested by his readiness to take risks, self-initiative and self-organization of his/her own activities. This is an indicator of his creativity and innovation. Thus, by accepting and encouraging his initiative and entrepreneurship in shaping the educational process, the child is accepted as a co-constructor of the kindergarten curriculum [25].

Based on the Law of Preschool Education and State Pedagogical Standard of Preschool Education in Art. 9. it is stated that kindergarten ensured implementation of special curricula of pre-school education for gifted children. Early detection and determination of gifted is carried out by a psychologist in cooperation with other professional associates of kindergartens. The special program of pre-school education and training for gifted children is carried out by kindergarten teachers and other professionals and sometimes in cooperation with the other educational and scientific institutions. The special program of pre-school education and training for gifted children is carried out by kindergarten teachers and other professionals and sometimes in cooperation with the other educational and scientific institutions [13].

In the National Framework Curriculum for Primary Education and Secondary Education in Chapter 10. children and students with special educational needs are mentioned. Gifted children and students are particularly featured. This document provides talented and gifted children and students the recognition and development of their capabilities. The educational institution is obliged to discover talented and gifted students and to ensure the development of their abilities, to focus on meeting the special cognitive, social, emotional and physical needs of talented and gifted children and students, with constant monitoring and evaluation of their achievements. For gifted students, an individualized curriculum is created that meets the needs of an individual or group. The curriculum should reflect an

advanced level of thinking and problem solving, which is the property of these students, the depth and complexity of the content that give them the right challenge and weight and the opportunity for creative expression. The individualized curriculum includes student support schemes that eliminate or reduce barriers to achieving set goals [24].

The school provides the students an inclusion in the educational program in accordance with the level and type of their gift, additional teaching and other forms of work that encourage their ability and creativity. The design of an individualized curriculum requires proper adaptation, which means the difference (differentiation) of the content or subject and time of course of teaching and the form of work. Regular programs include: *enrichment* - indicates horizontal adaptability within the entire curriculum; *extension* - represents vertical adaptability that allows student to progress faster with the curriculum; *acceleration* - involvement of students in regular primary education or the possibility to going to multiple classes during the same school year; *mentoring* - providing specialists for certain areas; *competitions* - an opportunity to express their abilities and talents and their evaluation and self-evaluation. Out-of-curricular programs relate to various extracurricular activities, workshops, summer and winter schools and clubs where children and students attend programs according to their special areas of talent, gift and preference. Excellence programs are educational support to the gifted in developing their pronounced preferences and opportunities. They are realized in co-operation with schools with scientific-research institutions, with economics, with prominent specialists in the field and with various associations [24].

3 CHARACTERISTICS OF GIFTED CHILDREN

A gifted child is born with an unusual ability to overcome a certain area of activity. We can distinguish three features: premature development (faster progress than average children), insisting that they "play by their own" (higher quality achievement, different learning paths, self-confidence and self-confidence) and mastery of struggle [34]. Some of the additional features of gifted children are: learning more readily and remembering what they have learned, having a longer range of attention and a more extensive dictionary, better in solving problems and abstract thinking, resisting comforter and training, having diverse interests, being more independent and more competitive, possessing more curiosity and greater information fund, more ideas, more persistent and more creative [20]. Although the needs of each (gifted) student are unique researches and experts agree that gifted students overcome complex ideas in their entirety and express interests that differ from those of their peers. They often possess an unusually well-developed sense of justice, certain experiences are experiencing extremely emotional; sometimes their hobbies and games are more suitable for the elderly, and have the tendency to enjoy the company of older ones. The capacity for empathy is more pronounced and easier sympathize with the feelings of others and have a more sophisticated and mature sense of humor [6]. Betts [3] considers that giftedness should not be observed and defined within distinct categories; every aspect of personality and development affects one another and giftedness should be viewed as a "construct that affects personality."

In a school context of gifted students, one can notice that they have excellent school achievement or self-gathering information which they use. They are extremely interested and participate in all school activities. They have good memory, quick understanding and acquiring knowledge, and awareness about their own interests. Creative or productive abilities are often expressed in originality and creativity in solving problems or creating new ideas. Furthermore, they have a very high sense of humor and a ray of self-confidence. They are prone to risk and gain new experiences. Other features that radiate are: the independence of thinking, the ability to diverge, and the avoidance of conformism. The ability to lead and manage is manifested in excellent organizational skills. Often, such pupils have very high expectations for themselves, but also from others and are prone to domination. Individuals stand out in the field of art such as acting, dance, music, literary and etc. Psychomotor abilities are manifested through various sports activities and activities in particular sports. They usually have good coordination, precision of movement and high level of physical energy and athletic ability [21].

Thanks to their high intellectual abilities, the gifted children are better with stress, conflict and development challenges. However, even if they are exceptionally creative, they may show signs of inadequacy or poor academic outcomes in certain subjects. Often the expectations of adults and the expectations of gifted children are mixed and that can be very stressful. Sometimes gifted students can feel suspicion in themselves and their abilities, which happens when the teachers who work with them are intolerable, if the peers do not accept them, or even parents bring them to a "critical point" because of great ambitions and expectations. They are exposed to frequent examinations,

competitions, tests, meetings with other people. Loss of energy on continuous evidence of giftedness results in frustration, isolation, and additional stress.

The measuring of the characteristics of gifted children in the literature can be found as a psychometric and multifaceted approach. Psychometric approaches include divergent opinion tests, which allow comparison of results with a standardized sample, but this way of measuring talent and creativity is a bad predictor of creative achievement in everyday life and nothing is mentioned about personality traits, motivation, and environmental conditions. The theoreticians of the multifaceted approach agree that the convergence of a large number of factors requires the emergence of creativity [30]. Author Berk points out Roberto Sternberg's and Todd Lubart's theory of investing in a creative individual and his investment in something new depends on cognitive, personal, motivational and environmental resources.

- **Cognitive resources** include: great knowledge, problem recognition and ability to define the problem, constantly changing divergent and convergent thinking, insight process, evaluating more simultaneously present ideas.
- **Personality resources** that are important to the development of gift and creativity are: inventive style of thinking, persistence and tolerance of ambiguity, willingness to risk and perseverance in their own convictions.
- **Motivational resources** imply a focus on the task rather than the goal. It is important to know that goal-oriented tasks are often backed up by extrinsic rewards which can sometimes jeopardize creativity.
- **Environmental resources** – research have shown that in the background of gifted and creative children are families which are orientated with children's needs - warmth, sensitive, parents, dedicated to the development of their child and providing a positive model. The caring teachers are also important who are competent for working with gifted children. Contacts with peers sometimes may be very difficult because many gifted children can be socially isolated and are therefore prone to emotional and social disadvantages. In kindergartens and schools where the emphasis is on acquiring knowledge and less on the original application of knowledge, there is a tendency for childhood thinking to become flawed - limited to the usual associations that produce correct answers [2].

4 TRANSITION TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

During a lifetime, a man faces different processes of transition to life, which requires confrontation with several levels of change and is considered to be a significant life experience in identity construction [26]. Research of transition is a highly complex and varied area of research. It is very important that transition from one development stage to another is "smooth". The research has shown that children who experience this transition in a poor way show behavioral problems and are less successful in academic life, and problems can continue in the next few years [29]. It is possible to specify the transition conditions in the education system, in particular the transition from kindergarten to school. So author Janus believes that transition to school is a complex process for every child and his family, while pointing out that the process of adjustment begins before the children cross the school grounds. It is therefore extremely important to balance the expectations with excitement, known to the unknown. In addition, the author states that this equilibrium greatly influences the child's adaptability to the school environment, increasing his satisfaction with school life, including play, education and socialization with other children and adults [19].

Adapting a child to school is most likely not the first, and certainly not the last, adaptation through which people pass through life, but it is certainly one of the most important. Of great importance for an efficient transition to school is building the sense of safety of children in the school environment and improving their intellectual accomplishments. The way children adapt to the transition from kindergarten to school is linked to the way that they deal with the challenges of new situations. Successful transition from kindergarten to school is often associated with question how much a child enjoys in school and if there is constant improvement in his academic abilities. Negative adaptation is usually followed by anxiety, the child avoids school, has negative attitudes toward school, and is more difficult to adapt to the difficulties. In addition, transition involves a wider range of involvement of participants, children, teachers, families and communities. Traditionally, there was a limited access to transition that was focused on structural determinants in schools and pre-school practices in order to enhance the adaptation of children to school. Structural determinants included raising the age of

school enrolment, introducing a special transition class or curriculum, and providing support programs for children who were considered unprepared. Changes in school age included early retirement for gifted children or early retirement for children with disabilities. The authors conclude that transition is a unique event in a child's life that involves changes that require a child to adapt instead of looking at the transition as a long-lasting and dynamic process involving a number of participants. Thus, according to the traditional approach to adaptation difficulties, they are considered as problems for a child or a family, not a sign that schools or pedagogy need to change something [16].

Transition processes require a child's psychosocial and cultural adaptation to the cognitive, social and emotional dimension of the new environment into which he enters. The transition period to elementary school is a developmentally important and often stressful process in a child's but also in family life. The transition characteristic is that the individual is within the phase of accelerated changes and the periods in which the emphasis is on intensive learning [32]. This results in accumulation of various stress factors, at the same time due to adjustments and changes that need to be made in many areas and because of internal psychological processes and creating relationships with new people in life [10]. Some research has shown that child adaptation to the new developmental phase is associated with the many characteristics of children, including their psychological maturity, temperament, social skills, and intelligence and learning abilities [23]. Transition from kindergarten to school is recognized as a particularly sensitive period because about half of the problems experienced by children come from this period [33]. When transitioning from kindergarten to school started, children experience great stress, and crude reactions can be avoided if the rate of change in childhood is reduced and if changes are predictable and controlled [26].

In defining the transition from kindergarten to school in modern pedagogy we find an explanation of how this process is still approaching in a traditional way. In fact, in the theory and practice of transitioning a child from kindergarten to school, it is still about the child's readiness for school and how much a child is prepared for school, how much did the kindergarten prepare for school [16]. By studying recent literature, seldom can be found research results that are related to the question of how well the school is ready for the child, and which is of crucial importance in the transition process of all children, especially the gifted child. In order to appreciate continuity in childhood upbringing and education, it is necessary to take into account the child's previously acquired experiences, whether family or kindergarten, that shaped his individual development. In transitional practice, it is difficult to harmonize and define common principles, primarily because of different images of children by educators and teachers [12]. Among other things, it is important to point out that transition from kindergarten to school brings changes in child development at three levels: on an individual level, on the level of relationships between individuals and on the level of living environment [15]. The authors also point out that transition from kindergarten to school means changing identity. Powerful emotions, such as anticipation, curiosity, pride, and uncertainty and anxiety must be overcome. New competences need to be acquired, such as learning competence, adoption of cultural patterns, new behaviors. By coming to school, the child must establish new friendships primarily with teachers and with their classmates. The relationships with the family are changing: in addition to the former role, the child also has the role of a student with different expectations and behaviors. When a child arrives at school, he meets a school curriculum that brings new forms and methods of work in relation to kindergarten. How the child will overcome the school tasks depends on the child's developmental abilities, his previous experience, and the child's special needs.

In the literature a number of studies examined what was of particular importance for a transition from one stage of development to another. It was found three areas of primary importance: (a) continuous alignment of the program and plan of work and expectations between kindergarten programs and elementary school work programs; (b) a positive relationship between a child and his or her family, school staff, administrators and community staff; and (c) a continuous partnership between family, kindergarten, school and community [29].

4.1 The role of family and professionals

The transition period from kindergarten to school is a very important opportunity for educational professionals and partnerships with families. Families are important in sharing information about family rituals needed to promote children's school success. Families can provide information on the way children learn and behave outside the kindergarten and school environment, a unique family dynamic that can affect learning, and important information about the child's abilities and needs. Whether the family's impact on transition from kindergarten to school and child adaptation, apart from the characteristics of the child itself and parental procedures, are also taken into account, other factors

such as parental experience and their own schooling experience, parental attitudes about school and parental expectations [27].

It is very important to plan and organize meetings with educators, teachers and parents, but this practice focused on the needs of particular families is still not enough in practice. Some research has shown that parental involvement in the work of the educational institution contributes to the better readiness of the child for the school and the better developed socio-emotional skills of the child as well as reading and mathematical abilities [22], [1], [14].

The development of a child's positive "self-image" has a great influence. Parents who have previously noticed the signs of giftedness in their children, accordingly shape their expectations and faith in the child. However, research shows that it is not always advisable for a child to recognize early "signal" of gifting because too much forcing can negatively affect their development. Čudina-Obradović [11] points out that the parent's emotional warmth and self-confidence, the positive attitudes of learning, education, knowledge, high expectations of self and child, the interest of the child's success, and the application of democratic, but clear disciplining methods, development of child confidence, sense of competence and desire for independent permanent activity in the area of interest [31].

In the educational system, whether it is a kindergarten or a school, it is very important that we have professionals who are competent to work with gifted and talented children and students. To begin with, it is necessary to understand this problem and to better understand the gifted children. The role of a teacher is very important too, first of all in creating an atmosphere in which a gifted child will feel successful and accepted. Such atmosphere promotes intrinsic motivation, and children are provided with the opportunity to actively engage in activities and teaching, use themes of personal importance as well as the activities that are challenging. George [8] considers that it is very important to listen to a child, to encourage skills and open conversations, to accept ideas, to give time for reflection and feedback, to appreciate openness and individuality, to encourage self-confidence, to enhance active learning, and organizing extracurricular activities. In order to support the development of a gifted child in kindergarten and school, and to enable a smooth transition from one environment to another, it is essential for professionals who are working with children to have enough knowledge, information and special knowledge of giftedness. Also, it is important that you continually improve your skills in this area. Some authors point out that the application of innovation is a precondition for a proper approach to working with gifted children. Innovators and teachers who are open to innovation encourage children to accept a new and unparalleled way of learning, and then giftedness becomes visible and develops in the right way. When a gifted child goes to school, working with him requires specific teaching strategies and approaches that include: everyday challenges in the area of the child's talents; learning that supports the child's learning style; opportunities for socializing and learning with peers of similar abilities; work in the field of interest and connect with out-of-school adults who support his talents [4]. Therefore, we can say that gifted children in kindergarten and school raise the quality of the educational process. They also encourage educational staff to further learn and devise creative activities to have the ability and ability to "follow" a gifted child and further stimulate his creativity, innovation and creativity.

5 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE

One study examined views of educators and teachers about giftedness and developmental abilities when working with gifted children of preschool and primary school age and concluded that the transition from the kindergarten to the school was not sufficiently explored although. It is emphasized that the quality of transition is important in supporting the child's development and giftedness. Thus, research has shown that kindergarten teachers monitor and identify the child's ability in relation to the program concept and the area of development of the child's early and pre-school age, while teachers identify child's ability in relation to the syllabus. It is also important to point out that the results of the research show that teachers are more inclined to direct the child's gift. Kindergarten teachers develop activities and materials that allow continuity in childhood experience and see giftedness as innovativeness and creativity, while teachers see it as academic activity [18]. The same authors conclude that it is impossible to talk about designing developmentally appropriate practices by classifying gifted children according to different performances and areas of interest, which will result in the number of gifted children being inversely proportional to the chronological age of the child, which is the older chronological age of the child will be less gifted children.

For the proper development of a gifted child and his academic success, ultimately his professional success requires continuity in monitoring, development, and encouragement of his gift. In order to

achieve this continuity, it is necessary to co-operate and harmonize the curricula of early and pre-school education and the elementary school curriculum. The practice demonstrates the necessity of improving the education of professional staff for adequate didactic-methodical work with gifted children. The uncertainties of many parents and pedagogical experts in the area of early education reflect the lack of clearly set expectations of the school as well as the lack of well-established school educational opportunities. The specific "school philosophy" of certain schools is unknown to the specialists in education and to the teachers until the child beginning go to the school. A special role in the practice of co-operation between kindergartens and elementary schools takes the procedure for recording the child's abilities for the school. The entire preparation of the child for kindergarten, as well as the cooperation between the family and the two educational systems, must be considered. Communication between the child and his or her parents, children and teachers is indispensable, which requires communication skills within the appropriate social system [15].

In order for the gifted children to be supported and encouraged by the social environment, while at the same time society should receive the maximum of gifted individuals, it is necessary [8]: the existence of a network of specialized organizations, governmental and non-governmental institutions dealing with giftedness; identification and support system from the earliest age; regular and additional education of teachers and teachers for working with gifted children and young people; the separation of the areas of education and provision of gifted from the education and training of children with special needs; fostering an atmosphere in which excellence and achievement is expected of all children; re-examining prejudices against the gifted and fostering the irony of creativity, inventiveness and entrepreneurship in society.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Any transition from one life span to another can be defined as a phase of life-changing and is associated with developmental requirements and accelerated learning in a particular social context. In the educational context, facing with transitions attracts more and more attention from researchers, particularly from family to kindergarten, from kindergarten to school, etc. Transition can encourage further development, but in adverse conditions, permanent difficulties may arise, leading to the problematic behavior of the child with certain consequences. A particular attention should be paid when working with gifted children, who move from kindergarten to school. Unlike "average" children, they may have different perceptions and expectations from the beginning of schooling. Expectations of the parents of gifted children may also be different.

The strategy for transition a child from kindergarten to school should be developed in three ways: preparing and assisting families and parents to prepare a child for the school; organization of kindergartens so that in their work plan they include the preparation of a child for school, a school organization that should provide a wide range of developmental levels, circumstances and temptations to meet the needs of children. In order to achieve this, it is necessary for the educational professionals to acquire adequate knowledge of work with gifted children, as they will be better understood and better educated in this way. Then they have a holistic approach to learning and developing children that is to take into account the social-emotional and intellectual abilities of the child and his ability to observe. And in particular, when transitioning from kindergarten to school, they collaborate on the level of educational institutions and with parents in order to achieve continuity in the further development of creativity, gift, inventiveness and self-confidence of the child.

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